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James Morrow
A Meditation on

War Stars: The Superweapon and the American Imagination by H. Bruce Franklin

New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1988; \$22.95 hc; 254 pages

It's a crisp autumn morning here in idyllic State College, Pennsylvania. The long-range bombers are off alert, the tactical nukes are headed for the scrap heap, the rail-based MX missile deployments have been curtailed, the Russians are reciprocating, God's in His heaven, all's right with the world. In such an upbeat atmosphere, who needs H. Bruce Franklin's sardonic, complex, and depressing analysis of America's infatuation with the technology of mass destruction?

We all need it, I think. For among its many achievements, *War Stars* demonstrates just how deeply the myth of the superweapon is embedded in our collective psyche. What was published in 1988 as an indictment of the nuclear *status quo* emerges in 1991 as a warning against undue euphoria. I came away from *War Stars* convinced that we shall never, in Jonathan Schell's ringing phrase, "cleanse the earth of nuclear weapons" until we first cleanse our souls of nuclear worship. Yes, the recent Bush-Gorbachev cuts are laudable and profound—astonishing even. But the bomb boys can be refilled within twenty-four hours; vast multiple-warhead deployments remain on land and at sea; the B-2 bomber is alive and well; a comprehensive test ban remains as elusive as ever; and the wizards behind the "strategic defense initiative," supposedly vindicated by the performance of our Patriot missiles during the Gulf War (even though the system leaked in precisely those proportions that SDI's opponents predicted), are prepared to spend a cool \$100 billion as soon as Congress gets around to writing the check. The Doomsday Machine may have been unplugged this year, but rumors of its death are greatly exaggerated.

Dazzling in its scope, dizzying in its erudition, *War Stars* is many books in one. In charting the ascent of the cult and culture of superweapons, Franklin maneuvers among a half-dozen modalities, from military history to film criticism, social commentary to literary analysis, media research to polemic. He is particularly sensitive to the ambiguous role that science fiction has played in the phenomenon—how the genre has functioned both as a puppet of the defense establishment and, at certain odd but significant moments, as a solitary voice of dissent.

Before looking into *War Stars*, I thought I had a pretty good idea of how the superweapon mystique had permeated the popular arts. I knew about *Strategic Air Command* and *A Castle for Lebewitz* and *Dr. Strangelove* and *Atlas*, *Babylon* and *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms*. I didn't know the half of it.

Item: Among the Ronald Reagan vehicles of the early 1940s is a minor effort called *Murder in the Air*, in which our future president, playing heroic Secret Service agent Brass Bancroft, blasts a spy plane out of the air with an "inertia ray projector." This huge futuristic ray gun is destined to become "the greatest force for world peace ever discovered."

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James Morrow prays for an end to nuclear worship
Gene Wolfe casts a Morlock's eye
on *The New Gothic*

Larry Niven concludes that the present
is safe from the future

Robert Killheffer visits the Planet of the Ape
Shira Daemon flies with *The Princes of the Air*

Richard Terra sojourns

with *A Woman of the Iron People*

Plus beauty, letters home, a martian rainbow, an old earth,
a king, a queen, a man, and the best books of 1991

Gene Wolfe

A Review of

The New Gothic: A Collection of Contemporary Gothic Fiction edited by Bradford Morrow and Patrick McGrath

New York: Random House, 1991; \$22.00 hc; 337 pp.

It is an extremely attractive book, somewhat taller than most. Its dustjacket is beautiful—there is no other word for it—and is printed on a substance new to me, something between plastic and paper. One expects, though one does not get, patterned flyleaves. The typography is elegant and the margins wide. The artist and the designers can be commended without reservation.

The editors' picture on the back flap of the dustjacket is the reader's first indication that something may be amiss. They stand elbow-to-elbow, not quite touching; neither looks at the other. Morrow glowers at the camera; McGrath eyes it sidelong and sly. Before them is a cast-iron fence; behind them a dark stone building that seems to be a church. If this is the new gothic, it looks remarkably like the old.

Two inches beneath their picture is what may well be the most extraordinary sentence in the whole book: "An Englishman living in New York for the last decade, Mr. McGrath..." It is the sort of thing that so frequently betrays aliens from far-off galaxies, and at first one imagines charitably that neither editor can have had anything to do with it—that it is merely the pulverized output of one of those steam-powered word processors up-to-date publishers use to grind out jacket copy. But, no. The same absurdity appears on the final page of the book itself.

There is a short introduction, signed by both editors, in which we learn that matters of faith no longer concern us.

Horace Walpole is credited with the first gothic novel, *The Castle of Otranto*... but the best of the first wave is Matthew Lewis's *The Monk*, which energetically tracks the

(Continued on page 3)

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spiritual collapse of Ambrosio, a bad priest, his rape of a lovely maiden in the treacherous vaults of a church, and his eventual damnation. . . . The consolation that Western souls once found in religion has faded; Faust no longer faces a Mephistopheles from divinity's antithetical underworld, nor is Ambrosio doomed to Christianity's eternal hell.

Keep this in mind.

The general fatuity could be illustrated by half a dozen examples, but one will suffice. "Night remains as dark as it ever was, but the houses we live in could not be more different." The comparison is to the time of Poe, and it is wrong. Although I live in the Middle West, there are houses within a few blocks of mine that were built not long after Poe died, and he would be less shocked by my neighbor's fake Tudor than by the florid Victorian celebrated by Charles Addams. (You would have to return to the Stone Age to come up with anybody who would be more than mildly amused by my own modest brick bungalow.) On the business streets of our town, Poe would find almost exactly what he would expect: a grocery and two pharmacies, stores selling hardware and men's and women's clothing, and a lumber yard.

What would be different, achingly and astonishingly so, is precisely the thing that Morrow and McGrath have told us is unchanged. Electric light shines from every window and hundreds of tall street lamps, and Poe would stare at all of them with the most profound amazement. What has happened? Where has night gone! All this should be obvious to anybody who thinks for half a minute about Poe's time and our own.

After the introduction's offhand dismissal of religion, one is more than a little astonished to find that the first story, "Ovando" (presumably *one-and-0*), by Jamaica Kincaid, concerns dealings with the Devil, who has taken the form of an Italian monk (from a far-off galaxy?), Frey Nicols de Ovando. I hasten to add that it's a wonderful story, vividly and violently depicting evil and the consequences of embracing it. But it would appear that Faust is not quite so remote from the modern mind as we have been led to believe.

"Horroraday," by Martin Amis, is in point of fact not horrible in any

sense. It is an excerpt from what must surely be a comic novel of English low life, *London Fields*. It has real wit, full of asides, lots of beer, the kind of offbeat characters who walk off with one's clothes, and moments of shocked recognition, as when the hapless daredevil champion is sentenced: "Consisting as it did of stealing odds and ends from very old people, community service was nowhere near as bad as it sounded." But if "Ovando" is old gothic, surely "Horroraday" is (by the standards in general use) not gothic at all—or anything close to it.

"Newton," by Jeanette Winterson, introduces us to Tom, a young man who lives in the suburb of the title and reads only gothic, whose works he keeps in his refrigerator. Having unaccountably omitted both Conrad and Melville from his list, he is understandably upbraided by a neighbor lady: "Miss Pin at the library tells me that all you ever order are the works of genius. She's got no record of you ever having taken out a sea story." The neighborhood has a dinner for Tom, hoping to talk some sense into him: "Thank you. It's very nice. I see it's chicken." "It's your chicken, Tom." Poking out of the neck of the chicken I can see my copy of *L'Étranger* by Albert Camus. I would like to believe that the author intended this story to be as funny as I found it.

"Banquo and the Black Banana: The Fierceness of the Delight of the Horror," by Paul West, is a tortured monologue by one who calls himself, and occasionally seems to think himself, a character in "the bad-luck Scottish play." Can you read whole pages of questions? Will you endure question after question? Question mark after question mark? Will you know the hideous traveling companion fathered by Shakespeare upon Mary Shelley? Will Banquo find a new victim in "the boundless ribbed halls of the space cruiser"? Do all these questions make you miss your periods? Is this really the new gothic? And if so, will there come a time when it will pass without question? Or has that time already arrived? Will the enchanted reviewer ever get around to saying that this is actually a very decent piece? Despite certain mannerisms? Do you feel by now that you know what they are, and are you right? Are any of us? Ever? Is that a dagger . . . ?

"Frenzies," by Anne Rice, is an excerpt from *Interview with the Vampire*. Unlike the other novel excerpts in this book, of which there

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Kathryn Cramer, Features Editor; L. W. Currey, Contributing Editor; Samuel R. Delany, Contributing Editor; David G. Hartwell, Reviews Editor; Robert K. J. Kilheffer, Managing Editor; Gordon Van Gelder, Managing Editor; Staff: Shira Daemon, Kevin G. Heifens, Kenneth L. Houghton, Donald G. Keller.

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are a lot, this stands up as a short story, and a good one. It's about two conventional vampires in New Orleans before the Civil War, and you won't find actions better blended with atmosphere anywhere.

"Blood," by Janice Galloway, is an unpleasant vignette concerning a piano teacher who has a tooth extracted by an insensitive dentist on the day her menaces begin.

In "Didn't She Know," by Scott Bradford, an attractive waitress discovers that elderly gentlemen are ultimately more satisfactory than young punks. I liked it.

"Regulus and Maximus," by John Hawkes, is yet another excerpt from a novel, *Monks in Shadow*. It's set somewhere in Europe during the Middle Ages, and the author soon launches into a lengthy description of the wicked monastery of Chrodegang. Now there was an almost endless list of sins available to medieval monks. They might fill into heresy or satanism, neglect the sacraments, break the Lenten fast or another, tyrannize the tenants, violate the seal of the confessional, intrigue against their abbot, their bishop, or their king, or rape, steal, and murder like other men. Sloth and aedia lay ever in wait. But the sin of which the monks of Chrodegang are accused is none of these—and in fact, is no sin at all. They are accused of feasting on a feast day. Seven young monks, self-righteously sickened by the sight of their brothers scarfing up pheasants, flee the monastery. (A milkmaid is so startled by the sudden appearance of these seven monks that she upsets two pails of milk. Exercise: Do you think that a modern high-school girl living near a naval base would be similarly surprised to see seven sailors? If not, why not? Compare and contrast the behavior of the two young women.) They run and run until they and the reader are tired, then meet up with another party of runaway monks at the ruins of an earlier monastery burned by New Goths. Which reminds me—wasn't that fellow in *The Monks* monk, too? Weren't we going to leave all this stuff behind? It seems like a better idea now.

"The Fish Keeper," by Yannick Murphy is a monologue by a depressed woman who eventually kills herself. If you intend to read it, it would be well for you to know that a Jack Dempsey is a kind of tropical fish. The fish is large and aggressive, as tropical fish go; the story short and slight.

"A Dead Summer," by Lynne Tillman, concerns a young woman who becomes so depressed by the death of a friend that she decides to sit in a quiet bar and have a couple of drinks. One sympathizes, but cannot quite escape the feeling that a demanding job, an affair, or even a good swift kick would put an end to the story.

After the last two stories, "Why Don't You Come Live with Me It's Time," by Joyce Carol Oates, may seem better than it really is, though that would be difficult. One wishes the punctuation were not quite so eccentric. "The other day, it was a sunswep windy March morning, I saw my grandmother staring at me, those deep-socketed eyes, that translucent skin, a youngish woman with very dark hair as I hadn't quite remembered her who had died while I was in college, years ago, in 1966." But this is as good a modern ghost story as I have ever read, cozy and chilling.

Robert Coover's "The Dead Queen" gives us the funeral of the wicked queen from the viewpoint of Snow White's Prince Charming. (They bury the queen in Snow White's glass casket, by the way.) While reading it, I thought I would have liked it even better if it had not been quite so sexually explicit; in retrospect, I'm not certain he didn't do it exactly right. A must for Disney fans.

"The Merchant of Shadows" by Angela Carter is badly flawed, yet oddly satisfying. Much too much of it is taken up by a professional lecture by a smug English grad student who would fit very well into "Horroraday." He's writing his thesis, you see, on the great director Hank Mann, born (as all true buffs know) Heinrich von Mannheim; and eventually he will visit the decayed Beverly Hills mansion of Mann's widow and make an ass of himself. And yet—this is not just new gothic; it is actually neon gothic, or perhaps art-deco gothic, and with all its faults one of the strongest stories in the book.

When an editor includes a story of his own in his book, experience tells readers grow as wary as hunted deer. Bradford Morrow's "The Road to Nadja" shows that our suspicions are not always justified. Here he gives us the autobiography of a character so repellent we would like to step on him like a slug, and so real we feel certain we have met him. I found the first sentence particularly effective: "I knew I loved Lydia when I

stole her ring." Poor Lydia!

In "For Dear Life," by Ruth Rendell, an aristocratic English woman of twenty-five rides the London Underground for the first time in her life. I confess that I was quite sure she was going to be mugged, although I sincerely hoped for Lovecraftian tunnel monsters. What actually happens—or as I ought to say, what happens in this story—will seem rather less plausible to readers who know or know of a few real aristocratic English girls, with their penchants for field hockey, sports in involving horses and dogs, and boogying till dawn in smoke-filled Soho dives. I reserve it for the end of my review, however. It was this otherwise forgettable story that—at last—caused the scales to fall from my eyes. It is this story, and not the inane Introduction, that holds the key to *The New Gothic*. Or so I am convinced.

"Rigor Beach," by Emma Tennant, is a revenge fantasy. A woman seduces and murders a nameless visitor; she decorates his corpse as a sandy isle much as one would furnish a doll house (she makes use of those little paper umbrellas they put in rum drinks, which I thought a nice touch), and dabbles in genteel necrophilia. As a story it is not without interest, but it really belongs on some therapist's desk.

"The Smell," by Patrick McGrath (that sturdy John Bull), is another revenge fantasy, one in which a dictatorial father climbs into a chimney for no good reason and suffocates there. I hope that McGrath felt much better when he had completed it.

"The Kingdom of Heaven," by Peter Straub is a Vietnam story in which a newly arrived soldier is made to open a body bag. All the soldiers have neat-o names like Pirate, Ratman, Underdog, and Picklock, and the whole thing is very P.C.

In "Fever," by John Edgar Wideman, a saintly black pastor cares for the sick during a plague. It's a difficult piece, but a worthwhile one.

"J," by Kathy Acker, is an impassioned attack on the sexual hypocrisy and puritanical morality of present-day New York. Yes, really. Vicious, powerful stuff, but ultimately self-defeating.


And lastly, "The Grave of Lost Stories," by William T. Vollmann, is yet another story in which Edgar Allan Poe is the central character, a genre so common that at least one anthology has been devoted to it. I am sorry to say that this is among the best, if not the best, that I have read—sorry because I have loved Poe since boyhood, and I would like to disbelieve. Was Poe in fact, in his worst moments at least, as miserable and near to madness as this? I would like to say that he was not, but I am very much afraid that Vollmann is right. Did William F. Gill actually keep the remains of poor Virginia Clemm Poe under his bed, and show them off to visitors? "Behold, gentlemen, the bones of Annabel Lee!" He did, and I would smack his dirty mouth for it if I could. I have laughed and jeered at the editors of this book, and at some of the authors, too. Now it's their turn—and yours—to laugh at me. I nearly wept as I read "The Grave of Lost Stories." I wish that Vollmann had never written it, though I believe that he feels much as I do.

Enough.

Let us return to "For Dear Life"; I repeat that it is the key to this book. As I said, there are no muggers. No one fondles or robs the young English aristocrat, or offends her any insult whatsoever. There are tunnel monsters, but they are not Lovecraftian. They are us. She is forced into close contact, you see, with the common people of her country, crushed in a crowded subway car at rush hour. She observes one man's dandruff and smells another's garlic-laden breath.

And the whole experience is just so awful that she dies. Yes, literally. She passes on to that great *Burke's Peerage* in the sky, right there in the bloody tube.

Thus "Horroraday" is indeed new gothic—it's smoking, swindling, beer-swilling characters are Morlocks, and they are precisely the sort of people who fill the car in which the aristocratic young Englishwoman dies. Thus "Didn't She Know" is new gothic, too, since the waitress and her lovers, old and young, are no more than the American counterparts of the people in that subway car. Thus "Newton" is the new gothic because Tom's neighbors are Morlocks, lacking the sensitivity and cultural refinement of Morrow and McGrath and the rest of the Eliot. And we, who are Morlocks as well, can be put off forever with their prattle in the Introduction. How acute of them.

A la lanterne! Up the Morlocks! Vive la Guillotine! 

Gene Wolfe lives in Barrington, Illinois.

Beauty by Sheri S. Tepper

New York: Doubleday/Foundation, 1991, \$12.00 p, 412 pages

reviewed by John Clute

It is November again, and frighteningly warm, here in London at the edge of the sun, 51 degrees north of the vexed equator, verging into winter. A colleague of a friend of mine, who is teaching these days in shirt sleeves because of the unseasonable heat, says something to his class, in passing, about the economic costs of global warming. A hand shoots up, which he acknowledges, as he should, for it is an adult class, and commands due respect. "This global warming talk," says the man who wished to speak, "is left-wing." There is no applause, as such, for it is an adult class. But the species—*homo sapiens*—has spoken its mind. The species has shown our face. There is no more talk of global warming.

The face *Beauty* wears seems, at first, pleasingly remote from all this. Sheri S. Tepper's new novel—it is something like the 28th she's published since her first in 1984—is presented on a second title page as "The Journal of Beauty Daughter of The Duke of Westfair," and soon settles us into the middle of the 14th century as though nothing could budge us till the end of the fantasy, the end of the tale. We know, as well, that there is something magic about her—italicized interventions in the journal she keeps make it clear that Carabosse, a fairy who is the keeper of clookoo, has a watching brief on the young girl, who is herself half-fairy—and we suspect she will become a Beauty of legend, Sleeping Beauty perhaps, or perhaps the Beauty who marries the Beast. We expect laughter and tears, transformation of frogs and princes, a visit to the land of Faery, and a few tocin notes of foreboding about the End of Magic. And all these gifts we are given, soon enough.

The main story turns out—or so it seems—to be that of Sleeping Beauty, but with the twist that the protagonist unwittingly makes her half-sister the victim of the curse, and seems to escape. But she stumbles across a television crew which has time-travelled from the 21st century to tape the hedge now surrounding Westfair, as part of a project to capture some of the last moments when magic had some purchase in the world; and they take her back upstream to avoid paradoxes; and she finds herself in the world Fidipuri (which stands for Feed the Poor), which consists of dying factory farms (dying because the world has been stripped of genetic diversity, stripped of oxygen, stripped of ozone, razed utterly) and terminaries choked with billions of office-wastily breeding members of the human species (thank Mother Teresa, thank Christians everywhere, thank the members of an economic class in London in 1991 who think global warming is "left-wing," thank us all). Beauty soon escapes to 1991, which she finds almost as terrifying as the

very final days, and ultimately returns home to the 14th century, where she finds that her travels are aging her at an accelerated rate. In addition, she must bear the burden of knowing that the world will end in the 22nd century, when Fidipuri finally caves into dust upon the bald planet.

Her travels have just begun. *Beauty* is a long novel, told with a merciless and compulsive fluency. It is many pages before we begin to sense why *Beauty* has been watched over so carefully; why her trips to Faery and to other kingdoms are freighted with such significance; why she bears within her breast a hurt and talisman that burns and cannot be removed without killing her. It would be unkind to reveal more of the ending of the tale. But it can be said that nothing in *Beauty* will save the human species from its compact with the sterile Dark Lord to drain from the world the odour of creation; it can also be said there will be an Ark.

In a sense, perhaps, the very ease of *Beauty* is its greatest weakness. The hardness of the message it contains—the message is that we have finished ourselves off, that it is too late, that the minds of an economics class in London will not be cleared of mayas in time to save the world—reads all too smoothly and gracefully upon the page. It is obvious that *Beauty* shares much with John Crowley's *Little, Big* (1981): both novels are shaped around a pulse of Story; both share a like vision of the near future; both novels confabulate of fantasy, planet-end and Faery; both take place in dying venues caught between the death of the world of fantasy on one side and the death of the world of fact on the other; both are plotted with considerable and loving intricacy around a central family over a span of generations; both offer a perilous thin thread of solace through the setting up, in each case, of a terminal enclave entwined in the briar stench of magic, and sequestered from our paws, and both novels, in the end, say the same thing to all of us. Take anything you want (they both say); and pay for it. But where *Little, Big* entices the reader in the intricacies of the task of making up a Story for our times, *Beauty* slips its message like a knife through skin and bone and brain, and passes. It is brilliant and subtle and fabulous. But it passes. It is just marginally too polished, too professional. It is quite read enough. Like any simulacrum of the magic it espouses, it leaves not a wrack behind.

John Clute lives in London and reviews regularly in *Interzone*.

Ishmael by Daniel Quinn

New York: Bantam, 1992; \$20.00 hc; 266 pages

reviewed by Robert Killheffer

Before we even open *Ishmael*, we are already preparing to ask certain inevitable and challenging questions: can it possibly live up to all the hype surrounding the Turner Tomorrow Award? Will it truly offer any constructive commentary about the various crises our civilization faces, and if so, will it avoid dull lecturing and achieve some measure of literary excellence as well? And, not least, can it really be worth half a million dollars?

Of course, this is a rather hostile (if unavoidable, in this case) approach to a text. We are daring the book and its author to meet our inflated expectations—and we are almost hoping it won't, that we'll be able to sneer and nod self-righteously as we read. Few novels, even those which draw million-dollar contracts or win other awards or receive massive pre-publication promotion, suffer such a challenge. And it is the miracle of Quinn's book that it overcomes this handicap, defeats our predisposition, and proves itself worthy on almost every count.

This success is the more surprising in that *Ishmael* assumes as improbable a premise as we're ever likely to see: the whole book is a philosophical dialogue à la Plato between a man and a wise, telepathic

gorilla. Believe it or not, there's really not much more to it—and yet it works.

Quinn's narrator is a cynical former hippie, disillusioned by the failure of this generation to effect any substantial changes in the state of the world, yet still harboring a tenuous hope that he might find a teacher, someone who genuinely has new, revolutionary ideas about fixing what is wrong in the world. So when he comes across a classified ad reading "TEACHER seeks pupil. Must have an earnest desire to save the world. Apply in person," he (like the reader of the book) is scornful, yet cannot help but investigate, if only to verify that his intuition is correct.

What he finds is no charlatan, but Ishmael, a gorilla who found while in captivity that he could communicate with people by thought. Over the years the ape has studied human history and culture in great depth, and now Ishmael seeks to pass on to humans the insights he has gained. The wisdom-hungry narrator quickly enters into a dialogue with the gorilla, and the book begins in earnest.

Ishmael is heir to the long tradition of utopian "novels" extending

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from *The Republic* through More all the way to the utopias of modern science fiction, and like its literary ancestors, Quinn's book consists almost entirely of discussions between its characters exploring the author's own ideas. Only the most minuscule of plots lurks behind the long, thoughtful exchanges, and the characters of the narrator and Ishmael are no more than schematic—one is the eager but often obtuse student, the other the guru employing the Socratic method to lead the pupil to enlightenment. Though this may sound to some like a cure for insomnia, *Ishmael* is never for a moment dull or slow-moving. Not a word is wasted. Quinn reinterprets all of human history—especially that period our culture sees as the most significant part of history, the last ten thousand years or so following the spread of agriculture—and examines the foundations of our society's attitudes and beliefs and how they have led us to the crossroads we now face—all in a mere 260 pages.

By and large, Quinn's analysis rings perfectly true. In some ways, I was almost disappointed because there were few things I had not thought of myself, when I have tried to figure out the source of our world's ills; but Quinn has explicated his ideas so concisely, and has worked his analysis so neatly back to its origins in prehistory, that even if the conclusions are not a revelation to all, it is heartening and inspirational to see them plainly spelled out in print without the usual admonitory preachiness and tediousness associated with manifestos of this sort.

I won't spoil the reading experience, nor attempt to match Quinn's careful exposition, by repeating all his ideas here. His analysis boils down to identifying two separate "myths" or "stories" which have dominated human culture since the agricultural revolution: one is that by which pre-agricultural peoples have always lived, and the other is the myth adopted (or evolved) by those groups which settled down to farming and set about spreading their way of life over most of the planet, until today there are very few (and ever fewer) isolated groups who maintain the pre-agricultural lifestyle. Essentially, pre-agricultural humans (whom, for reasons I will not explain, Quinn's Ishmael terms Leavers) lived for three million years as one among the many creatures of the earth, hunting and gathering what they needed, with their population remaining mostly constant at the level their habitats could support. As naturalists have observed among other creatures (and contrary to common ideas about such a hunter-gatherer lifestyle dating back to Hobbes) life for these humans was not a constant battle for survival, but a rather peaceful and leisurely coexistence. As Ishmael points out, rather than worrying and working more than modern, civilized people, the Leavers were "far less anxiety ridden" than we are.

"Far from scrabbling endlessly and desperately for food, hunter-gatherers are among the best-fed people on earth, and they manage this with only two or three hours a day of what you would call work—which makes them among the most leisureed people on earth as well."

The agriculturalists, on the other hand, whom Ishmael terms Takers, decided that it would be better to rely not on the bounty of nature, which of course in times of drought or disaster may fall below human needs, but rather to take their maintenance into their own hands. In doing so, they removed themselves from the processes that united all the creatures of the earth, the community of life—and exempted themselves from the laws that govern other creatures, and pre-agricultural humans. No longer were they satisfied to take what food they needed and leave the rest to other creatures, now they felt they could only be safe if they eliminated the competition. Plants they could not eat were killed; predators who preyed on their domesticated beasts were mercilessly hunted down; other peoples who did not farm were pushed from their land so the farmers could cultivate that ground as well. Their population rose and rose in a way no other creature's has ever done, at the expense of every other creature's space. The Takers formed a culture based on the belief that the world was made for humans, that they were meant not to share the world but to rule it, and that they must pursue that conquest no matter what the cost to themselves or the world itself.

Obviously, this is exactly the mythology which underlies our

society. All the mythological systems of our civilization (in both its Western and its Eastern traditions) have placed the world and all its creatures at humanity's disposal. And of course it is our rampant, unchecked growth, our callous disregard for other life forms, and our determination to control as many elements of our environment as possible, which have led us to the point of almost destroying the only planet and the only ecosystem which can support us. Quinn makes the important point that, contrary to our culture's belief, the evidence shows that this urge toward conquest and control is not inherent in the human condition, for it is not and was not a part of the many Leaver cultures which dominated the world for most of humanity's time on earth. According to Quinn, this urge is a departure from natural law which may destroy us if we cannot escape it in time.

One of the most effective moments in the book comes when Ishmael reinterprets the stories in *Genesis* from this new perspective. We all know the story of Cain and Abel, but few have noticed the peculiar bent of the story—Cain is very specifically identified as an *agriculturalist*, a tiller of the soil, and Abel is most certainly not; he keeps the traditional Leaver life of a herder. Yet it is Cain who murders, and Cain who is cast out, accused by God. Ishmael explains that the story of Cain and Abel must have originated among the Leaver cultures in the Mesopotamian region, who were suddenly encountering extremes of hostility from the farming peoples (whom they had once regarded as brothers). "With this story," explains Ishmael, "the Semites were telling their children, 'God is on our side. He loves us herders but hates those murderous tillers of the soil.' . . ." In this story, "agriculture is not portrayed as a desirable choice, freely made, but as a curse."

This reinterpretation is provocative and even attractive, but of course it is pure speculation. More than any other text, the Bible has always lent itself to as many contradictory interpretations as it has readers. In *Ishmael*, as in any sweeping analysis of human history, the processes of history are simplified to an absurd level—Quinn discusses events and vast historical movements as if clear choices were made by self-conscious, objective individuals, as if all the unnamed players were aware of the long-range, mythical significance of their actions. History, of course, is comprised of billions of individual lives, driven by individual urges and beliefs, as well as random luck and happenstance.

This does not necessarily obviate Quinn's conclusions, but if *Ishmael* has any very important flaw, it is here. Quinn might have devoted more time to the complexity of history, and the role of chance and of individual motivations in shaping its course. For instance, Quinn (through Ishmael) says that "Takers believe in their revolution, even when they enjoy none of its benefits. There are no grumblers, no dissidents, no counterrevolutionaries," meaning that there are none who object (or ever have objected) to the destructive aspects of our culture's behavior. Of course this is untrue—the dissenters have not ever significantly stemmed the tide of conquest and growth, but there have always been people outraged by the extermination of the American Indians, people disgusted by the wholesale slaughter of coyotes and other predators who prey on livestock, people who have wanted our culture to treat the other inhabitants of our planet with respect and leave them room to prosper as well. There are plenty of people today trying as hard as they can to knock some sense into the rest, to stop the unbridled population explosion, to change the assumptions of our Taker culture. But these misleading generalizations are few. For the most part, Quinn dissects our cultural heritage with admirable (and shaming) perspicacity.

About two-thirds of the way through, when most of Quinn's analysis has been explicated, the reader might begin to worry that, for all his insight, Quinn will fall back on the pipe-dream advice that the solution to the world's ills lies in a return to a preindustrial, preagricultural simplicity. We wonder if, after so thoroughly criticizing some of our society's most fundamental tenets, he can offer any realistic solution. Can there be a compromise? Fortunately, Quinn is smart enough to know that if people will accept any solution, it must be one which allows them to maintain most of the benefits of our way of life—who's going to give up indoor plumbing, reliable dental care, or the pleasures of literature and art? If we can stop our fanatical drive toward growth, and learn to give other creatures room as well, we can keep what we have and not drive the world to extinction. "As I pointed out some time ago," says Ishmael toward the end, "human settlement isn't against the law,

it's subject to the law—and the same is true of civilization.' The narrator-student sees it now: 'belonging to the world means ... belonging to the same club as everyone else. The club being the community of life. It means belonging to the club and following the same rules as everyone else.' Ishmael replies, 'And if being civilized means anything at all, it should mean that you're leaders of the club, not its only criminals and destroyers.'

Quinn offers a realistic, optimistic (if extremely generalized) vision of how to save the world. But he is not perfectly sanguine about his solution's chances for success. The narrator laments, 'I'm afraid it's a cause to which almost none of humanity will subscribe. ... what the people of this culture want is to have as much wealth and power in the Taker prison as they can get. They don't give a damn that it's a prison and they don't give a damn that it's destroying the world.'

At this point, it's hard not to share Quinn's closing note of hopelessness. For all the apparent awakening of concern in the past few years (of which, in fact, the Turner Tomorrow Award and *Ishmael* are themselves encouraging evidence), very little progress has been made. George Bush and his lackeys in the Forest Service still pressure environmentally-conscious administrators to violate federal limits and cut as much old growth as they can. It took a rebellious federal judge in Washington to save the spotted owl from Bush's disregard for other life forms. Similarly, as a recent *Time* magazine article showed, the few remaining Leaver cultures on the planet are being wiped out. Quinn's book does a better job than any other of pointing out exactly where

we've gone wrong and what we need to change to save ourselves, but it's hard to believe there are enough sensible people out there to succeed. But we must try. There is no more grave situation facing us today.

Some may wonder (as if it matters) whether or not *Ishmael* is a science fiction novel. It's not, in the sense that the utopian "novel" tradition to which it belongs produces fictionalized manifestos or essays, not novels in any real sense of the term. But the science fiction element (Ishmael) is no mere gimmick. The sweeping nature of Quinn's analysis requires, I think, a non-human guru. He might have chosen an extraterrestrial, but that would have been too clichéd, would have smacked too much of an outdated salvation-from-the-stars plot. The telepathic gorilla might not be believable, but I think it was a better choice. In this sense, *Ishmael* continues to validate its sole claim on the realm of utopian fiction in this century—only with the conceits available to the if writer can utopian visions be explored convincingly.

So does *Ishmael* live up to the hype? We must say yes. Does Quinn offer substantial, realistic solutions to the world's mess? Yes, in a general way, more clearly than anyone else has in recent years. Does he do so without making his book dull, and by maintaining a modicum of literary integrity? Amazingly, yes.

And is it worth the half a million bucks? If *Ishmael* sets in motion the great work it proposes, setting us on a course of sanity and making humankind once more a member of the community of life, then its value will hardly be measurable in dollars—Ishmael will be priceless. ▴

Cosmic Time Travel: A Scientific Odyssey by Barry Parker, Ph.D.

New York: Plenum Publishing, 1991; \$24.50 hc; 300 pages, 95 illustrations

reviewed by Larry Niven

Time travel was pure fantasy until the early days of this century. Then Einstein showed that time is subject to manipulation. Others began looking into the possibilities: cosmologists, astronomers, mathematicians, physicists, philosophers. ...

Writers of fiction were a long time catching up.

If time travel is fantasy, it's still more fun to treat it as science fiction. The loss of causality in time travel—the option to violate or even to reverse cause and effect, shoot Adolf Hitler, rescue Jesus of Nazareth—builds a temptation to play games of logic and reason. It's the H. G. Wells tradition: time machine.

But Parker follows another tradition here.

Parker's emphasis is on interstellar travel. Yes, the book concentrates on time travel, but only because cracking light-speed inevitably makes time travel possible.

Don't mistake the book for fiction. It's a text on esoteric physics. The closest Parker comes to fiction is a mention of Carl Sagan's science fiction novel *Contact*. It's there because Sagan involved Kip Thorne of the California Institute of Technology in his design for a transgalactic transport system.

There are no complex equations. There are no airplanes here either, though it's about transportation. There are sketches and graphings of spacetime. The men of mathematics and astrophysics and modern geometry move through the book: Einstein, Schwarzschild, Minkowski, Kerr, Hawking, Penman. The path leads through quantum mechanics, X-ray and infrared astronomy, primordial black holes and the black holes at the cores of galaxies, space and time merged and curved in strange geometries. The book is rich in the ideas that shape the frontiers of today's physics, ideas that barely touched the science fiction world until this last couple of decades.

Every science fiction writer needs this book. Few of us will shape time machines to match what we find here; but at least we'll know what rules we're violating. We need to understand what we write about.

Does Parker give us a time machine? Yes, in a way. His trail through physics builds nicely to a variety of transport systems. There's Tipler's rotating cylinder (a working time machine, but infinitely long) as modified by Gribbon (and now it's finite, but still as massive as a sun. See it in action in Paul Anderson's *The Avatar*). Parker describes the transport system defined for Sagan's *Contact*, and shows that it can be

simplified. ... maybe. Ultimately, it becomes a wormhole through spacetime (an entirely respectable entity in modern physics) with one end movable. The hole may be lined with "strange matter" (hypothetical stuff, not very respectable) to keep it from collapsing. Or you can square off the silhouette of the wormhole, leaving edges but no curvature. Now accelerate the moving end of the wormhole to near lightspeed, or (much cheaper!) dip it into the Schwarzschild radius around a black hole.

The system is then a freeway or railroad, not an airplane. You can't go where it isn't, so you'll never visit a time before you built it.

But as for stories. ...

Why did you want a time machine? To repair the past, wasn't it? To unmake the mistakes of history, or your own mistakes? But it's never possible to stop with one change. A time machine would give you godlike powers. ... you, or some other.

Parker's analysis doesn't offer nearly so much. The best he can do with current physics would still be damn difficult to build. After summoning up a wormhole (somehow), lining it with matter that may or may not have objective existence (somehow, without the wormhole closing on the engineers!), you must retrieve the endpoint and move it where you like (through tides that would rip a proton apart). Or you might build a cylinder with the mass of four suns, 100 kilometers long and 10 kilometers in radius, using materials hellishly dense and rigid enough to retain that shape against gravity and to stand up to the next step: spinning the cylinder at better than half the speed of light. ...

Parker speculates that civilizations ahead of ours may already have done the work. But it's still true: You need godlike powers to make a time machine. You can't use it before you've built it. You have to become god-like first.

So, Tourists and conquerors invading Los Angeles from the next century are still fantasy, and I for one am much relieved. ▴

Larry Niven once stole the title and the device from Tipler's crucial paper: "Massive Rotating Cylinders and the Possibility of Global Causality Violation." A friend alerted Tipler to the theft. The mathematician sent Niven a "gracious" letter and his paper demonstrating that time travel would inevitably generate naked singularities.

War Stars

Continued from page 1

Item: Exactly one month after the final installment of H. G. Wells's *The War of the Worlds* appeared in the January 11, 1898 issue of the *New York Evening Journal*, this same paper began publishing a direct sequel, Garrett P. Servis's *Edison's Conquest of Mars*. In this "effervescent advertisement for imperial aspirations, superweapons, and warfare of extermination" (as Franklin puts it), the New Jersey inventor concocts not only an electric antigravity spaceship but also a long-range disintegrator beam, subsequently leading a successful genocidal invasion of Mars.

Item: Among the reading material devoured by the young Harry Truman were magazines like *McClure's*, which in 1910 printed Jack London's virulently racist "The Unparalleled Invasion." The plot revolves around a brilliant American scientist whose secret weapon saves the world from the Yellow Peril.

There are dozens of such tidbits in Franklin's book, and delicious as they are, he doesn't overplay their significance. *War Stars* astutely avoids the sort of media determinism practiced by Marshall McLuhan, Neil Postman, and others in the late 1960s. "When Harry Truman makes his fateful decision [to drop the bomb]," writes Franklin, "he was behaving as a fairly typical American man of his era . . . This is not to argue that he was directly influenced by the pre-World War I future-war fantasies serialized in the magazines to which he subscribed as a young flier in Missouri." Franklin implies that if you want to comprehend a society, you cannot stop with its popular arts. "While emphasizing cultural aspects, I do not mean to imply that they have been the main source of the empire of superweapons, for the cultural rationalization of these weapons is itself a product of the technological and industrial potential for producing them."

Throughout the 212 densely-printed pages of the book's main body, Franklin delineates two great themes. The first is quite explicit: of all the modern nation-states, America has been singularly transfixed by superweapons, paradoxically seeking deliverance from war through the machines of war. The second theme emerges gradually, and it is even more disturbing: the erosion of both democratic ideals and common morality by the culture of "defense," a devotion reflected most dramatically, perhaps, in the spectacle of the American public, at one time manifestly repulsed by the very notion of killing noncombatants, accommodating the immolation of over 75,000 civilians on August 6, 1945.

War Stars has sweep. It's the kind of free-ranging book in which a factual account of Thomas Edison's various weapons-building fantasies flows naturally into a consideration of the sociopolitical subtext of Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*. It's the kind of individualistic narrative in which a chapter innocuously titled "Don't Worry, It's Only Science Fiction" invites us to consider whether we've become "so accustomed to the unconstitutional assumption of war-making powers by the presidency that most Americans no longer perceive this as an abrogation of democratic government." It's the kind of quirky work in which a jocular account of John Campbell being visited by government officials with orders to cease publishing A-bomb stories leads logically to an angry but cogent argument to the effect that obliterating Hiroshima was an act wisely lacking in political, military, or moral justification. (I'd heard the Campbell story before, but had forgotten the wonderful coda in which he demurs "on the grounds that those weapons appeared so frequently in *Atomwondering* that their sudden disappearance would be a signal to the Axis that they were close to being produced, thus prodding the Nazis to redouble their own nuclear-weapons research.")

Section I of *War Stars*, "Beyond Manifest Destiny," traces the roots of the superweapon syndrome back to the eighteenth century. We're accustomed to picturing Robert Fulton as the heroic, determined, and basically benign inventor of the steamboat, but evidently he was closer to a real-life version of those monomaniacs Jules Verne wrote about a generation later—the lone genius out to spoil war through technology. In 1800, seventy years before the publication of *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*, Fulton invented a torpedo-armed submarine called, of all things, the *Nautilus*, a weapon he saw as purely defensive. In his 1810 volume, *Torpedo War, and Submarine Explorations*, he

theorized that, since "science" was responsible for the proliferation of deadly surface fleets, "then may not science point out a means by which the application of the violent explosive force of gunpowder shall destroy ships of war, and give to the seas the liberty which shall secure perpetual peace between nations . . . ?" So Fulton not only anticipated Captain Nemo, he also anticipated Ronald Reagan, who in 1983 called upon "the scientific community in our country, those who give us nuclear weapons, to turn their great talents now to the cause of mankind and world peace, to give us the means of rendering those nuclear weapons impotent and obsolete."

Nearly forgotten today is the profusion of "future-war" stories and novels that appeared between 1880 and 1917, most characterized by a bizarre mix of gadgetry, imperialism, and xenophobia. Among the more revealing titles are *Anglo-Saxons, Onward!* A *Romance of the Future* by Benjamin Rush Davenport and *The Last War; Or, the Triumph of the English Tongue* by S. W. Odell. One popular subset of the future-war genre relied on a particularly appealing formula: a solitary American techno-wizard invents a superweapon in his private lab and subsequently saves the world. Among the more outrageous examples Franklin exhumes and examines are Simon Newcomb's *His Wisdom, The Defender*, Hollis Godfrey's *The Man Who Ended War*, Arthur Cheney Train and Robert Williams Wood's *The Man Who Racked the Earth*, and John Stewart Barney's *L.P.M.: The End of the Great War* (L.P.M. stands for "Little Peace Maker," a steam-powered, forty-thousand-ton antigravity airship from which the prodigy rains down preemptive destruction on Germany.)

I'd always thought of Thomas Edison as a hard-working anti-Semite who'd invented a tickertape machine and other useful devices, but until reading Franklin I hadn't realized he was also perhaps our nation's first Dr. Strangelove. Franklin documents the inventor's obsession with using A.C. as a defensive superweapon. "In each of his I would put an alternating machine of 20,000 volts," Edison explained in 1892 to a reporter for the *New York World*. "A man would govern a stream of water of about four hundred pounds' pressure to the square inch, with which the 20,000 volts alternating current would be connected. The man would simply move this stream of water back and forth with his hand, playing on the enemy as they advanced and moving them down with absolute precision." Edison never got to electrocute any of his country's enemies, but he did lend his prestige and ingenuity to the Naval Consulting Board, a research lab established in 1915 to produce "new devices that will assure peace to our country." Observes Franklin: "Ironically, the most mythologized of all lone inventive geniuses played midwife at the birth of the faceless giant now called the military-industrial complex." In his later years, Edison's fascination with weapons led him into an eerie anticipation of post-Hiroshima deterrence theory. Interviewed in 1921 by the *New York American*, he urged the world's governments to "produce instruments of death so terrible that presently all men and every nation would well know that war would mean the end of civilization."

Section II of *War Stars*, "Victory Through Air Power," chronicles the advent of America's first actual superweapon: the bomb-carrying airplane. By Franklin's account, this dubious breakthrough began with the frustration of certain World War I generals over the various ethical and technological constraints on "total war," i.e. attacks on civilians. The revolution received a spectacular boost through the showmanship of General Billy Mitchell (most especially his 1921 public demonstration of bombs sinking captured German warships), heated up with the RAF's incendiary raids on nineteen enemy towns (including Dresden, which contained no military targets whatsoever), and climaxed with our B-29 Superfortresses implementing General Curtis Le May's ambition to burn Japan to the ground (four cities, Hiroshima and Nagasaki among them, were deliberately spared, so they might be eradicated through a different technique). Franklin never lets us forget the actual meaning of military euphemisms. "In World War II," he tells us, "U.S. strategic bombing concentrated on what Billy Mitchell and other theorists referred to as 'industrial targets' (cities), 'transportation centers' (cities), 'communication complexes' (cities), and 'nerve centers' or 'vital centers' (cities)."

Against these historical realities, Franklin juxtaposes various fictionalized depictions of "strategic" bombing, from Disney's famous propaganda cartoon *Victory through Air Power*, to Hollywood cheer-leading like *Air Force* and *Strategic Air Command*, to the two great

antiwar novels of the 1960s, *Slaughterhouse-Five* and *Catch-22*. Franklin's readings of both Vonnegut and Heller are fresh, provocative, and inspired.

Section III, "Chain Reactions," offers an irreverent biography of America's second great superweapon, the thermonuclear bomb. Franklin intercuts the basic historical narrative—the destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the ill-conceived Baruch Plan for preventing an arms race, the birth of the H-Bomb, the advent of the ICBM—with revealing slices from the popular culture, including Fred Allhoff's 1940 pro-bomb propaganda novel *Lightning in the Night*, Lewis Mumford's famous "Gentlemen: You Are Mad!" in the March 2, 1946 issue of *Saturday Review*, and, of course, Stanley Kubrick's *Dr. Strangelove* (which so bewildered critic Andrew Sarris he accused Kubrick of having invented the famous Air Force slogan displayed in the film, *Peace Is Our Profession*).

Canonical science fiction—movies as well as books—comes under particularly close scrutiny in this section. I must admit, I'd never considered looking into the rather obscure H. G. Wells novel called *The World Set Free: A Story of Mankind*, but Franklin has piqued my curiosity. Evidently physicist Leo Szilard was so shaken by this grisly forecast of atomic war that he attempted, through the patenting process, to keep his description of the laws governing chain reactions a secret. ("This was the first time, I think," wrote Szilard, "that the concept of critical mass was developed . . . Knowing what this would mean—and I knew because I had read H. G. Wells—I did not want this patent to become public.") Equally prophetic was Robert Heinlein's 1941 story "Solution Unsatisfactory," in which the United States developed the ultimate weapon, a form of radioactive dust that could be carried aloft and scattered over enemy territory. Franklin wryly notes Heinlein's assumption that no civilized nation would actually inflict such a technology on its enemy without warning. In the story, before the strike occurs, America provides a demonstration for the German ambassador, blankets the targeted area with photos showing the weapon's terrible power, and urges the potential victims to evacuate.

Though he stops short of crediting 1950s and 1960s science fiction with saving the world, Franklin is clearly moved by the anti-nuclear messages of Theodore Sturgeon's "Thunder and Roses," Ray Bradbury's "There Will Come Soft Rains," Judith Merrill's "That Only a Mother," the same author's *Shadow on the Hearth*, Mondale Rothwald's *Level 7*, Walter M. Miller's *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, Philip K. Dick's *The Penultimate Truth*, and Ward Moore's "Lot" and "Lot's Daughter." (In a rare oversight, the author neglects to mention the film version of these last two stories, an efficient little Ray Milland picture called *Panic in the Year Zero*.) Franklin also takes affectionate note of the fact that, when discussion of atomic weapons was officially forbidden in mainstream periodicals during the years 1940–1946, the much maligned *Life* magazines kept the public mindful of the issue.

Murray Leinster's 1946 *The Murder of the USA*, "a glorification of the doctrine of deterrence," inspires a different set of emotions in Franklin. "With admirable frankness but bloodcurdling morality," Franklin writes, "the novel confronts head-on a problem conveniently evaded by most advocates of nuclear deterrence. If a nuclear attack is launched in secret by a government acting without the knowledge and consent of its citizens, how can one then justify the mass [retaliatory] slaughter of the people of that nation?"

In Section IV, "Final Solutions," Franklin suggests that America's third great superweapon may arrive courtesy of our SDI *wunderkind*, particularly if they pursue the "nuclear-pumped X-ray laser," a technology whose capacity to attack civilian and military targets may prove far greater than its ability to defend them. For Franklin, the dream of SDI becomes particularly immoral when it instigates us to place nuclear weapons under computer control. To make his point, he again turns to the jeremiads of *if*, in this case D. F. Jones's 1966 novel *Colossus* and Harlan Ellison's 1967 story, "I Have No Mouth, and I Must Scream."

In the final chapters of *War Stars*, Franklin reveals the central contradiction of SDI: the very technology that might keep a "reentry vehicle" from falling on Washington, Miami, or Los Angeles also serves to rehabilitate this singularly obscene and disgusting variety of bomb. By taking the terror out of nuclear war, space-based "shields" make it suddenly thinkable, perhaps even acceptable. As Franklin puts it, in a

Read This

Recently read and recommended by Bryan G. Chofim:

Letters Home, Gene Wolfe, United Mythologies Press. This book is just what the title says it is, a collection of letters home. Specifically, it is the letters Gene Wolfe wrote to his mother while he was serving in the army during the Korean War. Well, I can't pretend that this volume will stand among the great war memoirs of history, and Wolfe doesn't either, but he felt they were worth preserving, and I think they are worth reading. There isn't much here for literary historians, though obviously this was a major formative period in the author's life. But it does provide some interesting insight into military life and that war in particular, at least for those of us too young to remember it personally. Most of the gory details of the war are omitted, on the assumption that his mother would not really want to hear about it, but he does get in a good bit of commentary along the way. Perhaps the most interesting thing about the book is that we have it now to read; which is to say, it is being published primarily because the author survived the war. If he had not, there would have been no *Shadow of the Torturer*, no *Soldier of the Mist*, no *Pence*. And so these letters and photos probably would have continued to sit in the family trunk, leaving us to wonder what might have become of one more boy who didn't come home.

The Total Devotion Machine, Roseanne Love, The Women's Press. I've only seen two copies of this book in the U.S., and I own one of them, so don't be too surprised you've never heard of it. Not only is it hard to get here, but due to the archaic processes of British book distribution, it is not available in Love's home territory of Australia, either. And this is really a shame, since this book contains some of the sharpest wit I've come across in a while, with a bright, jangly style and high humor reminiscent of Carol Emshwiller and Kit Reed. The stories in this volume are all centered around relationships; between men and women, between humans and machines, and the not-so-humans, and between humans and their environment. Australians, or at least their writers, show a stronger awareness of their relationship between themselves and their history and the land they live in than many American writers have about theirs, and these stories are no exception, displaying a perspective unlike those found in most of what's published in our magazines today. So if you want to have your head knocked around a bit and have a good laugh at the same time, go down to your local McBookstore and demand they get a copy of this for you. ▲

statement that summarizes not only his position on SDI but also the central thesis of his book,

Star Wars is no more "defensive" than Robert Fulton's submarine, torpedo, and steam warship, the turrets of a B-17 Flying Fortress, the electronic countermeasures of a B-1 bomber, the concrete shielding of an ICBM silo, or, for that matter, the multiple thermonuclear warheads on the missiles themselves.

For all Franklin's indignation, he is no misanthrope. "This book has emphasized the power of superweapons in American culture because, so far, their sponsors have won all the major struggles. But certainly that does not prove that infatuation with superweapons is any more characteristically American than revulsion against them, or that nuclear weapons express the will of the majority of the American people. For when have the people had an opportunity to vote or otherwise record their views on any of the major issues and decisions concerning nuclear arms?" Throughout *War Stars*, Franklin avoids letting his well-earned anger degenerate into facile nihilism.

My only criticism of *War Stars* is a left-handed condemnation

indeed: I wanted more. Near the end, either out of exhaustion, a looming deadline, or both, Franklin hits upon a particularly rich vein of superweapon culture—the responses of filmmakers and writers to the nuclear saber-rattling of the Reagan era—and then declines to mine it. I would have treasured Franklin's perspective on such provocative films as *Threads* and *The Day After*, his interpretation of such intelligent novels as David Brin's *The Postman*, Carolyn See's *Golden Days*, Tim O'Brien's *The Nuclear Age*, Russell Hoban's *Siddley Walker*, and Denis Johnson's *Fishbone*, and his comments on the plethora of SDI apologetics that issued during the 1980s from the Jim Baen fiction factory. A few titles and authors are mentioned, but none of the corresponding works receive the sort of analysis accorded *Level 7* or *The Murder of the U.S.A.*

When I first undertook to describe *War Stars* for the readers of *NTRSF*, I realized I'd never been quite so daunted by a reviewing

assignment. I was apprehensive that I might leave out some crucial dimension of its thesis or pass over too many of its revelations; the book is so rich in particulars, so luminous with startling facts, surprising insights, and what at the risk of oxymoron I shall label telling trivia, that no critic's summary can do it justice. The only adequate review of *War Stars* is *War Stars* itself. And while it would be impractical to reprint Mr. Franklin's entire text right here, I shall certainly give him the last word.

"Some of us may live long enough to learn whether the human imagination and intelligence that created our superweapons will be great enough to discover how to get rid of them. Who knows; perhaps our descendants will be able to look back at the culture of superweapons as a strange aberration in the prehistory of humanity." ▲

James Morrow's most recent novels include *This Is The Way the World Ends* and *Only Begotten Daughter*.

A Mirror, Not a Window A Woman of the Iron People by Eleanor Arnason New York: William Morrow & Co., 1991; \$22.95 hc; 525 pages reviewed by Richard Terra

Ostensibly about humanity's first contact with another intelligent species—a window looking out upon other worlds—Eleanor Arnason's *A Woman of the Iron People* is, in fact, a rather meditative, mirror-like reflection on some very difficult, very human issues. It is a thoughtful and engaging book. Arnason's clarity of conception and execution allow the reader a view of not only the sparkling surface tale, but also a deeper, quasi-metaphysical look at the problems and possibilities of intercultural communication.

Arnason's novel relates the experiences of the crew members of the human interstellar expedition chosen to make first contact with the inhabitants of Sigma Draconis II. After a brief prefatory "memorandum" purporting to be instructions to the ship's crew on just such a possibility, the novel opens with a long chapter describing the early years of Nia, a female member of the native species of the planet. Through Nia's eyes we learn about their nature and the way of life of one native tribe, the Iron People. The planet's inhabitants are pre-industrial, mostly pre-agricultural nomadic herders, hunters and gatherers. Yet their many cultures are sophisticated and complex.

The remaining bulk of the book, divided into two sections, is told in the first person by Li Lixia, a member of the ship's anthropology team. In a spare, direct and honest account, she describes her first encounters with the natives, learning the trade language used among the many tribes, her first groping attempts to understand the native cultures. Lixia meets and sets out travelling with Nia, who has been exiled from her own people for daring to think about, reflect upon, and finally choose to live outside of her people's traditional way of life. Nia is willing to examine new ideas, and to accept change.

Nia and Lixia travel across one of the planet's continents, sharing adventures, telling stories, meeting new people. They are joined by The Voice of the Waterfall, a native seer and oracle who accompanies them when the spirit of the waterfall whom he serves commands it, so that he may learn about the "new people"; and by Derek, another member of the human contact team. Together, they and the reader come to learn a great deal about one another and their respective cultures. Eventually they reach a great lake where the humans have begun to establish a small research base on the planet, to confront the difficult issue of whether or not the humans should initiate more open contact with the natives—and whether the native cultures could survive such contact. In the end the natives choose to allow the humans a limited foothold. It is a conclusion that offers no final resolution.

The book closes with another chapter told from Nia's viewpoint, a quiet coda that sums up all that has happened to her, and provides the first glimmer of what is yet to come for Nia and her people.

A Woman of the Iron People is a work of depth and elegance. Its greatest stylistic strength is the beauty of Arnason's writing—sparse, graceful and largely unadorned, yet unobtrusively revealing an unusually sure command of language. Her imagery is powerful and direct, and presented with a clarity that pervades the entire novel.

Arnason builds upon these strengths to create a whole, carefully observed world, peopled with interesting, multifaceted characters, and to tell a story that is by turns subtle and yet straightforward, thoughtful and yet filled with wit and a wry good humor.

Through the sensations and the thoughts of Nia and Lixia, her two viewpoint characters, Arnason builds her world with a slow, careful accumulation of significant details. Lixia's account of her travels and experiences reads like an anthropologist's field report, but is not a journal. Lixia does not dwell on her feelings and personal reactions, though she includes them. This restrained narration, the contained emotion, is entirely appropriate for such an account—and yet one comes to know Lixia very well. The characters, their companions and their surroundings become ever more substantial, taking on greater depth and a sense of completeness as the novel progresses.

This process is not without flaws, however. Arnason's creation of the native cultures is remarkable in its detail and diversity, in its fullness; these virtues, however, are also a source of flatness in the book. Although she has gone to great lengths to work out the details of the native cultures, Arnason's aliens feel decidedly human in their appearance, their psychology and largely in their cultures as well. The primary differences between the natives and humans lie in the nature of the native's sexual cycle (adult males live solitary lives, the females and children live in village encampments, and mating takes place only once a year, in the spring) and the resulting social consequences.

The speed and agility with which Lixia and the other members of the contact teams learn the languages of the natives, which are dependent on gestures to a degree unlike most human languages, also puts some strain on the tale's plausibility, despite the assumption that the humans are highly trained and skilled. One begins to doubt that this is an accurate depiction of the manner in which humanity's actual first contact with another intelligent species would occur. But these doubts are mitigated by the sense that Arnason was not striving for such accuracy anyway, that her purposes lay elsewhere.

These flaws aside, Arnason's depiction of the natives and their world is interesting and engaging, filled with inventive, internally-consistent and well-placed detail. Though not convincing as a depiction of true extraterrestrials, it serves admirably well as the foundation for her novel and the tale it *does* tell.

Arnason's tale is one of character, not setting. Her characters are quirky, sympathetic and complex personalities; they are whole, rounded individuals. Her development of these characters is deft and subtle. Their speech, thoughts, memories and speculations are woven into the tale skillfully, revealing more and more while they also move the story forward. Arnason's characters are real people, and they are wise—not wise with empty, meaningless platitudes, but with the hard, thoughtful wisdom of experience. The reader sees them change and grow as the tale unfolds.

Interaction between the characters is the subtext of this

book; they are the embodiment of Amazon's themes. One of the most delightful aspects of this interaction is the ironic good humor that pervades it. In one exchange, while discussing a native spirit-figure called the Trickster, Lixia and Derek unwittingly introduce a new gesture into the native repertoire:

"I know that spirit," said Derek. "Among my people he is called Coyote."

"I'm not entirely sure of that, Derek. Coyote is a sneak, but he isn't a bad person. I got the impression . . . that the Trickster is bad. Selfish and malevolent. He's like Loki."

"Once again, I don't know what you are talking about," Nia said.

"Don't worry about it. Lixia has a habit of wandering away from whatever people are talking about. She thinks too much, and her thinking goes off in every possible direction."

I gave him the finger.

"Is that a gesture your people use?" asked Nia.

"Yes. It is a gesture of disrespect."

"Ah! Let me see it again."

I repeated the gesture. Nia imitated me. "I thought you people had no gestures. It is good to know that you are not utterly strange."

This is a book of incident and dialogue; of experience rather than revelation. And yet it is leavened with a scattering of revealing, seemingly-digressive "told tales"—small stories told by one or another of the characters, in which the reader shares in their thoughts and world-views, and so comes to know them better. It is an interesting technique, one at which Amazon is adept. From within the narrative, these are oral tales, and yet appear upon the page as text. Amazon succeeds very well at preserving the feel and the effect of an oral presentation. Indeed, certain passages of the book work equally well—perhaps better—when read aloud, for the prose has an engaging cadence and rhythm.

The strengths of this book, and of Amazon's writing in it, are all the more rewarding and satisfying when viewed in comparison with her earlier novel, *Daughter of the Bear King*. That novel is a rather muddled, inconsistent, rambling science fantasy. It reveals the roots of Amazon's talents, and shows how she has quickly developed them. In *Daughter*, the details of observation are not quite right, not yet as carefully chosen to enhance the story and reveal character as they are in *Woman*. The characters are live and well-rounded, but largely impenetrable, their motivations opaque. The alternate world Amazon builds seems vague and rather derivative. Amazon's influences stand out clearly; there are many echoes of Le Guin's *Earthsea* trilogy.

The point of view in *Daughter* jumps between three of the characters as well as the third person; it is an interesting experiment, but does not really support the narrative, and so seems unnecessarily complicated. The narrative itself is something of a hash, without a true, readily apparent sense of direction. Amazon includes a few experiments with told tales—myths and folklore from the alternate world—that are really the best pieces in the book. Unfortunately, she relegated these gems to appendices at the back of the book, and so they contribute little to the novel. On the whole, *Daughter of the Bear King* is confused in both structure and execution, and thematically rather unsophisticated. Yet it is also entertaining and well-written; one sees the strong foundation on which Amazon has been able to build.

While *A Woman of the Iron People* is filled with incidents and details, they are all bound together and contained by the overall structure of two complementary narrative movements, bracketed by the two chapters told from Nia's point of view. The first movement is an outward sweep by the humans. They explore a new world and a new culture and, as individuals but also symbolically as a people and a race, are changed by their experiences. In the second movement, the sweep is inward, for the humans are returning to their people. But in this second section it is Nia and the Oracle, and by extension all the native peoples, who explore and who are changed by their encounters with a new people, a strange new culture, a new world. These two movements complement one another very well, forming a complete and satisfying narrative cycle.

It is also appropriate that they are bracketed by the chapters of Nia, for it is she who is at the center of the book. Nia is the pivot about which Lixia's narrative moves. Nia embodies—and then provides for the resolution of—the central problem of the story: the ability to recognize the new and the strange, to try to understand it and to find a creative reconciliation to and acceptance of the changes such encounters bring. Nia is the woman of the Iron People.

Amazon's novel also has a broad thematic—or perhaps ethical—structure as well. She presents a conception of a future human history that is refreshingly out of step with the current self-congratulatory arrogance about the "triumph" of capitalism and western-style democracy, with today's seemingly lock-step march toward a single political and cultural ideology. Through both the human and the native cultures depicted in her novel, Amazon articulates a world-view based on a tolerance of diversity and on an ethic in which differences are reconciled, though not necessarily resolved, without violent conflict or oppression. Throughout the book, the characters expend considerable effort attempting to achieve such reconciliations. Much time is spent in talk, in the asking and answering of questions, the telling of stories, in learning

Read This

Recently read and recommended by

Eleanor Amazon:

An Easy Thing by Paco Ignacio Taibo II. This is a tough guy detective story, set in Mexico in the 1970s. The hero—Hector Belascoaran Shayne—has set up as a Chandler type private eye, more or less on a whim. He is hired to find Emiliano Zapata who did not, it is claimed, die in 1919, but is still alive, having in the intervening time—among other things—fought with Sandino in Nicaragua. So Belascoaran sets out to find Don Emiliano, and we get a wonderful tour of contemporary Mexico City, a place the author clearly knows. All kinds of other things come into the story—a strike, a kidnapping, a murder and the various personal problems of the hero. In most mysteries, you don't really care about the question the novel supposedly turns on: who done it? This book asks three real questions about the real world—What happened to the Mexican revolution? How do you survive and remain human in a society where the bad guys have apparently won? And is Emiliano Zapata still alive? A fine and funny and charming example of how one can use a tired old genre to say something that matters.

I know of only three collections of sf poetry: *Holding Your Eight Hands* (1969), *Burning With A Vision* (1984) and *Time Frames*, which came out this year from Rune Press (P.O. Box 8297, Minneapolis 55408, \$12.00 each plus handling). If you read poetry, *Time Frames* is worth getting. I especially recommend the poems of John Calvin Remerski. He has a command of technique that is rare in the sf field. The best of his work has the feel—the tight energy—of real poetry. And he has a good sense of humor. I also like the work of Camilla Decarnin. It's in-your-face writing. And I like the poem Ruth Berman found in Darwin and her fifteen syllable poem on the origin of the universe.

If you don't read poetry, you ought to. A life without poetry is like a life with George Bush.

Songs for Drilla. This is mixed media, but there are words, and you can read them, since lyrics are included with the album. Lou Reed and John Cale did this. It is a rock memorial for Andy Warhol, and it's splendid: good words, good music, good playing, good singing: a fascinating portrait of a very weird and very smart man, who was doing more interesting things than I ever realized. Available at your corner music store. Get it! ▶

and thinking, as they strive to help one another see the world through each other's eyes.

The human crew of Amazon's starship is a fascinating (although perhaps exaggerated) mélange of cultures and political views. Most are social democrats or Marxists who look back at the excesses of a capitalist world system in our times with horror, disgust and pity. It is a refreshing change from the usually simple-minded depictions of a future in which a laissez-faire free market solves all human needs without a hitch. Amazon does not depict a utopia, just a culture in which diversity and difference of opinion are respected, calmly, with an undogmatic good humor and forbearance.

This ethical theme is reinforced by the native cultures. By and large, they welcome strangers, and there is respect for differing ideas and opinions—to a point. They are also bound by tradition. But their customs allow for the gradual acceptance of change, and it is Nia who becomes the catalyst, the advocate for change among her people.

Influences are also discernible in this book, but they are more that of a current of ideas, of interests and concerns running through the work of many authors, as well as Amazon's. *Woman* calls to mind a number of other excellent tales of cultures meeting, clashing, seeking mutual understanding: perhaps Joan Slonczewski's *A Door into Ocean*, or Ursula Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness*, *The Word for World is Forest*, or *Always Coming Home*. Amazon stands in good company here, and one can only hope she will continue to produce such mature, complex work in the future.

A Woman of the Iron People is, in the end, a meditation on a whole

set of real, difficult, human problems. As such, it fails as a realistic projection of what humanity's first encounter with another intelligent species might be like. But this is a failing—if it can be called such—that the book shares with the vast majority of first contact stories and novels, for reasons that are easily understood: how can a human mind imagine the thoughts, the cultures, the technology of an alien, non-human mind? Any human author's aliens will be a mirror, however subtly altered or disguised, of the author's human thoughts and human concerns. A true window seems impossible.

Amazon reveals a certain awareness of this dilemma in her book. At one point, for example, two of the humans discuss their impressions of the new planet. One says: "You probably were thinking of something on Earth... I noticed that in your reports—you kept trying to make this world a second Earth. Not only you. All the field workers. Everything was compared to something at home. Most of the comparisons are going to turn out to be false. This place is alien." (p. 354)

Amazon has not attempted to disguise the mirror as a window overmuch. Indeed, she hints at this in the "memorandum" which prefaces the novel, by choosing to disregard those possibilities which would lead to a first-contact encounter with aliens who are radically different from human beings, whether in form, development, or technology. Rather, she has chosen to use the surface of the mirror to reflect upon issues that are—or should be—of real concern in the human world. And in this, Amazon has succeeded very well. ▴

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Black Humors in the Blue *The Princes of the Air* by John M. Ford New York: Tor Books, 1991; \$3.95 pb; 248 pages reviewed by Shira Daemon

Does a culture stagnate and eventually fall if allowed no free choice? Does a man? To enter the universe of *The Princes of the Air* is to be seduced by the brilliant intrigues of con-artists, to be entrapped in a world where the action is as swiftly paced as a video game and as deadly as a cold equation. John M. Ford's novel describes a society that is so enmeshed in intrigue, so proscribed by the intricate dance of power, that it is impossible to uncover motivations and difficult to ascertain who is the controller, who is the dupe, and whether anything will survive the deceptions.

This is not surprising, given that *The Princes of the Air* (originally published in 1982) is a precursor of *The Dragon Waiting* (for which Ford won the World Fantasy Award). *The Dragon Waiting* is a novel of Renaissance intrigue and labyrinthine plotting with an emphasis on man's responsibility. Like *The Dragon Waiting*, *The Princes of the Air* also focuses on man's responsibilities, but it takes a while for this focus to emerge. The action propels the characters along the chessboard of political machinations at such a dizzying speed that the philosophical underpinnings are at first lost in the plot twists. When, on page 29, Orden Obek's teacher queries:

"Well, then . . . we ask . . . was Machiavelli wrong? Or Gandhi right? Is the ruler to be cruel . . . or are the people to pursue their common good?"

and a student responds:

"If the ruler is cruel . . . not merely strict . . . then the people will have a common good to fight for: the overthrow of the monarch. But if the ruler is not cruel . . . then the people will follow the ruler's own, diverse interests, as Gandhi said . . . and general opposition will not arise."

the discussion seems only a footnote in the rush of plot to get Orden graduated. It is only when the book returns again and again to the question of self-will and government that we realize there is more to this apparent space opera than a simple tale of boys just wanting to be

fighter pilots, famous diplomats, or brilliant military strategists.

Yet, the space opera itself is quite good. Orden Obek, the leading character and would-be diplomat, quickly upgrades from pawn to knight on the multi-layered chessboard of intergalactic politics and multi-spatial con-games. He starts by scampering tourists on his home planet, and moves into more complicated exercises until he finally manipulates the Monarchy itself. It isn't until his first audience with the Queen, a scene that leaves both the reader and the character unsure of whether Orden is pawn or power, that the philosophical uncertainties become more than just a footnote and the theme sets in.

The action then forges ahead. Orden, through his audience, has gained a letter of authority from the Queen. With the help of David Kondor, Theo Norne, and the letter, he puts on a highly entertaining bait and switch. Theo, an enigmatic character symbolizing the rebel spirit, gains a ship during the switch so that he can fight with the loyal opposition in the never-fully-explained revolution. David Kondor, who is emblematic of all that is good about Monarchy—being loyal to a fault, romantic and brilliant—receives a ship in the Queen's name, and goes to lead the Royal Fleet.

David fights and loves with a flair and panache that Orden longs to emulate, and Orden takes heart from hearing David recite Orden's own lines that "none but the brave deserve the fair," and "in the end there is that transcendence we call joy." Where David implicitly believes in the rightness of his world, Orden is forever ensnared by his own cynicism. Orden's intelligence—and his realizations about the role of men in his society—eventually force him to break through the web of lies and deceit that surround his own role as diplomat, and create the changes his world needs.

Circumstances propel Orden into a Catch-22—even after successfully performing a mission of vital importance to the Monarchy, and revealing all in a traumatizing debriefing—the political machine no longer trusts him. He is forced to choose if he will remain a pawn, if he will risk pain and his friends' lives by effecting change and taking charge of his own life, or if he should commit suicide.

This immersion in suicidal longing, which at first appears simply morbid, is actually a keynote toward change. Throughout the novel

Orden has wondered, "How can we live, when death is the end of pain?" When he is at his most suicidal, Wixa, his former roommate, answers that:

"No one takes pain willingly. Masochists least of all—they're slaves to it. And heroes—heroes are just as forced—it's what forces them that makes all the difference" (p. 180).

This statement metamorphosizes Orden from his cocoon-like passive political state, and empowers him to take command of his own fate and become a hero.

While the use of suicidal longings appears an odd choice in what is frequently straight space opera, the book is certainly not a Tiptree paragon to self-annihilation. Ford also uses the theme of suicidal tendencies in *The Dragons Waiting*, where Gregory, the vampire, frequently considers ending his own unhealthy life, but is always stopped by the intervention of fate, and the immediacy of his personal and political objectives. In *The Princes of the Air*, when Orden overcomes his suicidal tendencies he almost singlehandedly changes the direction of his world by moving it away from dictatorships.

Ecce and Old Earth by Jack Vance

New York: Tor Books, 1991; \$21.95 hc; 436 pages
reviewed by Arthur Byron Cover

Cossack cab drivers, perverted bureaucrats, egotistical museum curators, indolent aristocrats, and strange, introverted children with peculiar abilities are just a few of the building blocks present in Jack Vance's second volume of *The Cadwal Chronicles*, *Ecce and Old Earth*. Picking up approximately three seconds after the more colorful *Araminta Station* left off, *Ecce* pulls off the audacious stunt of continuing the adventures of plucky young hero Glawen Clartuc while taking a protracted detour to recount the efforts of Wayness, our plucky young heroine, to discover the whereabouts of the missing Charter of the Naturalist Society, the deed, as it were, that endows the denizens of Araminta Station with their legal and moral authority over the environment and people of Cadwal.

Wayness's detective work consists of searching through old documents or computer programs, finding knowledgeable sources or tracing missing people, convincing them to talk without revealing the value of the object of her quest or the potential for danger, and, when necessary, disguising herself as a maid or teacher in order to perloit the information she requires. Most of the search takes place on Old Earth, where there are computers, but apparently no electronic alarm systems, or little else we would think of as "high-tech." As Wayness is not the only individual searching for the Charter, there is a little bit of stalking and action, not to mention a few murders, to create suspense; these melodramatic plot elements may seem artificial, at times almost pulpish, but since Vance spares the reader little of the tedium and frustration of Wayness's search (in this regard he almost does his job too well), their presence certainly helped keep my interest. Vance isn't the type of writer who kills off his protagonists, but in this series it's clear all the secondary characters could face their final jeopardy at the slightest plot twist. He was somewhat merciless toward both the first and the third plucky young heroines introduced in *Araminta* (Wayness was the second). As for the frustration, it's all part of the plot, and Wayness's dogged determination and resourcefulness, not to mention her wit and style, make her an easy character to endure for thirty or forty pages down a dead end path.

And as for *Ecce and Old Earth* as an entity in its own right, it would be a problematical novel indeed taken by itself. The first few chapters deal with plot threads left over from *Araminta*; the reader unfamiliar with the first book would no doubt wonder who these people are and why should he care about them. Later, when faced with Vance's protracted detour, he would certainly wonder why Wayness would go through so much effort on the behalf of the moribund Naturalist Society. Wayness's tour of Old Earth has its intrinsic interest—Cossack cabbies indeed—but her search requires dramatic justification, and *Ecce* doesn't provide it.

At the end of the novel Orden has achieved a sense of balance. He has uncovered the deceptions at the core of his society, and rebuilt his life by gaining control of his own fears. He is still dark and cynical, yet he saves David from his own new-found morose tendencies. He convinces his friend of the dignity of the work to be done in rebuilding the republic, and the joy that can be found living life on its own terms.

The Princes of the Air, with its blend of well-conceived prose—ruminative in nature with an edge of poetry—snappy action, and adult themes, takes the measure of space-opera and adds depth and soul to the fun. It takes that old chestnut, the coming of age tale, and layers on a mature and believable growth in the hero, brought about not by the inextricable nature of a fickle universe, but by his own searching through the issues that define his existence and his world. Like Leigh Brackett's "Eric John Stark" series in *Planet Stories*, Paul Anderson's "Dominick Flandry" novels and stories, Samuel R. Delany's *Nova*, C. J. Cherryh's "Faded Sun" series, Orson Scott Card's *Enders Game*, and the recent work of Iain M. Banks, Colin Greenland and Lois McMaster Bujold, *The Princes of the Air* is the best of the venerable sub-genre. It is a novel in which we, like Orden Obeck—reluctant hero though he is—can discover our own measure of joy. ▲

On the other hand, from the standpoint of being a continuation of *Araminta*, *Ecce* fares very well. Throughout the first volume Vance mixes and matches selected themes and conflicts from our contemporary political and cultural life into a traditional if unusually rich science fiction recipe: Cadwal is a dangerous world not unlike those of Edgar Rice Burroughs's creation; the noble houses charged with preserving the ecological purity of their world are strongly reminiscent of those in Herbert's *Dune*; the class conflicts between the nobles and their laborers, the social chasm between them and the potential for violent revolution, bring to mind the sf of the pre-*Assembling* era; and the various young characters' conflicts between their personal desires and their different views of liberty and duty, not to mention their relationships with their elders and mentors, are strongly reminiscent of those in Heinlein. All these elements and more are fused into a work of nostalgic conservatism. And by conservatism I don't mean merely those libertarian but highly patriotic ideals we associate with the Buckley-Goldwater wing of the modern Republican party (though those notions are surely to be found in *Araminta*), but also a strong belief, expressed not in mystical terms, but with hard-headed, reasoned principles, that freedom and irresponsibility, of either the environmental or social varieties, are mutually exclusive states of mind. The free man has honor, the free man is a caretaker of the world. A man without honor deserves what he gets, and any man who puts his own self-interest above the good of others, or the planet, is a fool who also deserves what he gets. In this regard, the novels are decidedly and unapologetically old-fashioned, and even though a blurb writer errs when he calls *Ecce* a hard sf book, he would have been indisputably correct to call it a novel solidly in the philosophical tradition of Campbell's *Assembling*.

Vance's tapestry is varied enough, or perhaps Vance the writer is merely wise enough, so that even men and women of honor have their severe limitations. The mystery of who killed Sessily in *Araminta* remains unsolved for over four hundred pages, mainly because the culprit was taken at his word. Such is the investigators' honor, Vance implies, that they're temperamentally incapable of suspecting the heinous deed is lying until Glawen is at last hit over the head with the evidence. On Old Earth, in contrast, is a society whose honor is personified in the well-meaning, but old and invalid, curator of the moribund Naturalist Society. Elsewhere society is crippled by a fundamental lack of direction or purpose, as demonstrated in how Wayness's search for the Charter is frequently complicated by people who want to cheat or seduce her. Mr. Buffin's penchant for showing his erotic art to young ladies and the Countess's self-pitying temper tantrums and the childish pleasure she takes in bathing her servants with her cane are also the result of spiritual decadence. The more the reader learns of Old

Earth, the more the planet of Cadwall, for all its problems and shortcomings, seems worth saving.

As if all this weren't enough, in these books Vance amplifies his usual virtues to Brocknerian proportions. Throughout the scenery is economically yet exotically described, and even though the narration occasionally threatens to become an extended fashion show, with more costume changes than a Las Vegas revue, the very audacity of the opulence often pleases the mind's eye. The famous Vance satirical wit is also on-hand, in abundance, not to mention the deadpan utilization of clichés for the purposes of the author's amusement: in *Arminius*, Glawen actually must service the barren women of a religious sect or forfeit his life, surely a plot device John Newman would have been proud to resurrect, and at one point *Eccē* veers from Gothic send-up to cornball hillbilly comedy, complete with an appearance from a Ma Kettle type.

These books aren't perfect: Vance or his editors apparently didn't

notice that in *Eccē* some of the dialogue is unnecessarily repetitive, and in at least one case Vance forgot that he'd already covered one of his notions, because the second time the characters talk about it, it's as if they'd never mentioned it before. Also, the characterization isn't exactly what I would call deep. Once a character's personality is established, it tends to remain that way, without any of the contradictions or unexpected responses to a situation or remark you'd associate with someone from real life. In other words, the plucky young heroines are relentlessly plucky, and when Vance wants a character to be tedious, he isn't content to say the guy's a bore, he demonstrates it *ad nauseum*. In the final analysis, however, my most serious complaint stems from the knowledge of the three-year lag between *Arminius* and *Eccē*. I don't want to have to wait that long for Volume Three. ▶

Arthur Byron Cover lives in Northridge, California.

Gordon Van Gelder
Some Originality in a Time of Too Much Junk
An Eventual Review of *Dream Science* by Thomas Palmer
New York: Ticknor & Fields, 1990; \$19.95 hc; 308 pages

I lived in an apartment with rats for almost a year. The first-floor domicile—two small rooms with linoleum floors and very thin walls—overlooked a filthy back lot, a small square of land that nearly transcended cliché in its exemplification of inner-city squalor. Refuse thrived among the weeds, rusting cans and broken glass settled into the ground, and rodents took advantage of the many things this yard could offer them—including access to my rooms and belongings.

The rats only showed themselves once or twice, but the food they ate and the wood they gnawed were clear enough signs of their passage. Since my fulton lay directly on the floor, I didn't particularly care to share my place with these unwanted roomies; I thought it best to exert some territoriality, control my environment, rid myself of these squatters whose scurrying within the walls disrupted my sleep.

The details of my Battle with the Rats are suitably pedestrian, but just aren't comic enough to bear description here. No great madcap scenes, no absurd face-offs between man and rat, no antic chases with broom upraised: simply put, nothing worked. Rats are possessed of a wonderful survival trait known as novophobia: they fear the new. The traps I laid were carefully skirted, instinctively avoided. I finally moved out, and for all I know, the rats still live there; if perhaps you'd like their mailing address, please contact me through this magazine.

This apartment was in the Lower East Side, and on the occasions when time and weather afforded me the chance to walk home from work, I'd inevitably travel down Broadway to 12th Street. On the northwest corner Forbidden Planet, one of New York's largest science fiction and comic specialty stores, colorfully entices customers with shelves and displays of recent publications—paperbacks glitter with embossed covers, media magazines herald the approach of this week's hit or that week's miss. Across the street resides The Strand, a used bookstore that must certainly rank among the largest in the world; its exterior is cluttered with rambunctious wooden bins and metal carts crammed haphazardly with books, accumulating browsers throughout the day. I like to think that everything ever published in this country eventually passes through Strand's, and the diligent collector needs only patience in order for bargain copies of those most-sought books to surface.

I lived in the Lower East Side because, as an assistant editor, I had little spending money in general; none would remain by the time I reached 11th Street (and after these occasional odysseys had taken me past St. Mark's Place—8th Street—I was often in debt). Though I'd always browse the shelves of Forbidden Planet, I'd linger much longer at Strand's, wandering amid the stacks of weathered novels, nodding to familiar titles like old friends as I passed in search of new ones.

I don't remember seeing Thomas Palmer's second novel at Forbidden Planet when it was published last April, but I know it

attracted a lot of notice as something with originality in a time of Too Much Junk. One semi-prozine editor raved about it at Resdencon. Friends of mine who keep up with the "altstream" dropped Palmer's name in my ear at a couple of parties. The *New York Times Book Review* and the *Washington Post Book World* both gave it thoughtful consideration; after the *Post* review, at least two young writers approached me about possibly reviewing *Dream Science* for the NTRSF.

I toyed with the idea myself, like the other people who spoke with me about *Dream Science*, I enjoy being among the people who know all the latest releases, all the works of avant-garde that slip through the genre screens surrounding entertainment industries. As forms of mass entertainment continue reaching wider audiences, there is some pleasure to be had in finding rarities, like unexplored woods whose secrets belong only to their discoverer. Call it the frontier instinct, if you will; I call it novophilia, and it seems to me that it's common among science fiction writers/readers: even when we're living in depressed, rat-infested city dwellings, we want to be the first on our block to have the latest innovation.

Actually, I think we want to be the first people on our blocks to discover those things that will *endure*. There's a tendency among intellectuals to dismiss all that's new as trendy and ephemeral; I think the same impulses that lead many people to science fiction cause them to aspire to *discovering* greatness. "Hey, that's a beautiful round thing you've invented. A 'wheel'? Neat. You don't have an extra one, do you? I'd like to show it to some of my buddies."

Sf has a well-acknowledged pioneering impulse, but this critical element goes less often noticed. The trails we're blazing mean nothing if they don't lead us to a better place; the frontiers we wish to explore should prove to be home to natural splendors. What pride, what glory, comes of owning the first Edsel on the block? Of being first to have a joystick for a Texas Instruments computer? Novophilia is a wonderful survival trait—for the survival of the species, that is, since it constantly opens new avenues to follow or avoid, depending on the outcome of the individual's venture.

We published no reviews of *Dream Science* when it first appeared last April because I felt the novel, while notable, dissipated into vagueness. It had the quiet solitary hiss of a snowfall, but with only some of the snowfall's scenic beauty. Ultimately, I thought the novel was the sort of book one turns up in Strand's years later, examines briefly while wondering if the author ever wrote anything of note, and then moves on.

I hadn't heard mention of this book for more than half a year when I came across it on a recent excursion through Strand's. Prophecy fulfilled, I wondered then how much of *Dream Science* remained, how the novel looked through time's haze.

To its credit, *Dream Science* lingers well despite the dumb idea on

which it rests: "lines" separating what must be parallel universes have shown up inexplicably, and our hero has crossed one. The "lines" are just that—lines—and some people cross them easily (disappearing from view as they cross), while others don't. No one really knows where they came from or where they go, but our hero wants to get back to his wife and daughter.

The protagonist's name came back to me without much strain: *Rocker Poole*. An uncommon name, and it alone is nearly all I retain of his bland character. Neither a mover nor a Milquetoast, Rocker is an everyday family man, a banker of some sort who lives in Connecticut.

Rocker is neither very interesting nor very sympathetic, but he serves the book in one crucial way: he is rooted firmly in this world. For the book's dumb idea of "lines" is founded on some very good ideas about the nature of reality, and Rocker's stolid character allows us to feel very deeply the displacements that comprise most of the book. Of course our hero crosses other "lines"; unconventionally, though, these do not become your usual egotistical quest/adventures in exotic lands (almost all of which seem less exotic each time another book follows the formula with unimaginative results). Rather, Rocker's life has the same affect, the same feel, in each universe he encounters, and this uniformity is the strength of *Dream Science*. For as the hinges supporting "reality"

are unsecured, what remains is a human left to adapt to his surroundings. Sometimes these are nice. Or not. After crossing one line, Rocker discovers he is dead. Another time, he has a nice dog. By the time he returns to this gray world, he—and we—cannot feel sure that it won't change. And although the book falls away into a diffuse and obtuse ending, I still retain this diffident sense of reality being simply something through which we pass. Be our world what it will.

Thomas Palmer's name no longer springs from the lips of Those Who Are Up On Literature, and there are many reasons why this is so. The characters in *Dream Science* are forgettable and bland. The book's strengths are of a quiet nature, easily lost in the glare of its flaws. The prose, style, and story reinvented no wheels, the story structure brought nothing we hadn't seen before, the author's imagination created no realities never taken on our own. Its ability to displace, however, to unsettle those who've staked a claim in this reality, cannot be undervalued.

I brought my copy with me when I moved, and I nod to it now when I'm wandering the shelves of Strand's. And that's the beauty of it: every substantial novel is both new and old each time it's read, and every -phile and -phobe can share the images and essences and turns of phrase that make each book a world itself. ▴

Alexei Panshin

Some Notes on Whig History and Other Approaches to Reality

In the July 1991 issue of *NTRSF*, John Clute indicted *The World Beyond the Hill* for being "a Whig history." He identified this critical phrase as deriving from a 1931 book by a British historian named Herbert Butterfield.

Butterfield, it seems, objected to histories which treat the past as having no reality or validity except as an anticipation of some present state. Clute quotes him as writing: "Real historical understanding is not achieved by the subordination of the past to the present, but rather by our making the past our present and attempting to see life with the eyes of another century than our own. It is not reached by assuming that our own age is the absolute to which Luther and Calvin and their generation are only relative; it is only reached by fully accepting the fact that their generation was as valid as our generation, their issues as momentous as our issues and their day as full and as vital to them as our day is to us."

How right, how true! Also, how slanted, how wrong!

Which is to say, it seems to me that a number of problems present themselves in all this. There's a problem with this quote. There is a problem with the phrase "Whig history." There's a problem with Herbert Butterfield as an objective observer. And there is a problem with the aptness of Clute's criticism.

Let's begin with Clute. If the viewpoint he is presenting is correct, and every age and activity actually does have its own legitimacy which cannot be invalidated by reference to some supposed absolute derived from the concerns of another time and place... then Clute, by his own standard, has to be mistaken in attempting to judge Cory's and my 1989 metamythical study of developing images of transcendence in science fiction (1764-1945) by the sixty year old yardstick of a British historian's condemnation of self-celebrating, present-centered, relativistic history writing.

Cory and I aren't writing in 1931. Our concerns aren't the concerns of 1931. Our book doesn't celebrate the present moment (or any other, for that matter) as perfect and final. Nor are we even writing a history in the Butterfieldian sense, but something else that's more appropriate to our day. If Clute actually does believe what he quotes Butterfield as saying, then it would seem that he has an obligation to try to understand our book in its own terms—which he clearly hasn't done.

Hey, that's elementary logic.

As for Herbert Butterfield as an authority, the problem is that he is being presented as though he was an objective point of reference. But can he really serve as one? Or was he himself only writing from a pose of objectivity, but with an actual secret agenda and his own unacknowledged measure of relativism—pretending-to-be-absolute-truth!

I'm no academic, but I have been told that academics can be like that—outwardly rational and objective and authoritative as all get-out, but actually subjective, partial and political.

I raise this question because of an incidental anecdote I just ran across in Cory's copy of the Nov-Dec 1991 issue of *Harvard Magazine*, which arrived in the mail today. The cover story concerns an imaginative and explorative 45-year-old Harvard historian named Simon Schama. He is applauded and respected by some of his colleagues, but is accused by others of the sin of insufficient objectivity because he has passed beyond writing history in a narrative style, which was his previous questionable practice, to actually produce a work of historical fiction.

Would Herbert Butterfield have applauded this kind of fateism to get under the skin of another age? I can't say for certain, although I'm inclined to doubt it.

What can be said is that he was none too fond of Simon Schama when he was a bright young student at Cambridge University twenty-five years ago. From what the article indicates, Butterfield was the unacknowledged enemy of Schama's teacher, Sir John Plumb, to the point that he could arrange for Schama to receive undeserved low marks on a career-determining set of exam papers:

According to Plumb, it has only been with the recent opening of the archives of the late Sir Herbert Butterfield, former Regius professor of history, that a plausible explanation of this episode has come to light. It seems that Butterfield, a Christian, secretly devoted his energies to undermining the reputation of Plumb, a secularist, in the academic world. A disciple of Butterfield's had infiltrated the examining committee, Plumb says, and from there carried on his mentor's crusade. By giving low marks to the three papers he evaluated, he was able to prevent the committee from conferring on Schama the high honors its other members thought he deserved.

Beyond questions of religious belief and disbelief, I don't know what part ethnic and class prejudice played in this little drama—which we are told Schama managed to overlook brilliantly with his second set of required papers—but it might not be completely irrelevant to point out that Schama may have been a target in Butterfield's private war because, as well as being the star pupil of a secularist academic rival, he was also a Jew and the son of an Eastern European immigrant textile merchant.

Even if we take no more from this incident than *Harvard Magazine* gives us, however, we would have to say that serious questions concerning Sir Herbert's character, tactics and objectivity do arise.

With this said, let's turn to the problems that are raised by the phrase "Whig history." This phrase doesn't exist in isolation, unencumbered by baggage. It was offered by a particular man, in a certain time

and set of circumstances, with a particular intent. If we are to heed Butterfield's injunction, then we have to consider what it was meant to convey within its own proper context.

So let us return to 1931. What was the head-state then?

It was the depth of the Great Depression. People had not recovered from the disillusionment and trauma of World War I. Intellectuals of the period felt overwhelmed by the overturning of traditional religion and the triumph of scientific materialism.

In this atmosphere, a young Christian scholar with ambitions as an academic historian published a polemical little book entitled *The Whig Interpretation of History*. What work was it intended to do?

Was the book itself a history? Not exactly.

Was it then philosophy of history, suggesting how history as an activity should properly be pursued? Well, no, not quite. That might be how the book would present itself, to the point that it could be invoked as such by John Clute some sixty years later, but this would only be a cover or excuse for its true purposes.

According to Clute (partly quoting Butterfield himself), it was intended to be "an assault upon a cast of mind which studies 'the past with direct and perpetual reference to the present.'"

Not a scholarly argument about historical method, but rather an attack upon a particular cast of mind and its consequences, as Herbert Butterfield perceived them.

As a Christian traditionalist, Butterfield was protesting against the then-current success (and smug self-congratulation) of the un-Christian, un-traditional frame of reference which has been inherited by our time as the accepted norm. That was the war he was secretly fighting. Like so many upper-class, old-school Brits in the Thirties, Herbert Butterfield was revolted by the mediocre, prole-celebrating, materialistic and scientific Twentieth Century, and was trying, within his own scholarly sphere of action, to light a backfire.

For that matter, it would appear that he wasn't that fond of the Nineteenth Century, either. What he was was a partisan of the old pre-modern world of three hundred years ago. This becomes apparent in his opting to make fighting words out of the phrase "Whig history."

Who were the Whigs? They were Nineteenth Century British liberals—movers and shakers, reformers of society, partisans of progress, exponents of evolution.

And the actual Whig historians—the models of the breed—who were they? They were the narrative historians of the Nineteenth Century who presented history as a story with their own times as the hero. They unabashedly perceived all prior human activity as no more than preparation for the unprecedented knowledge, achievement, dominance and power of Nineteenth Century Europe.

If Butterfield were indeed the man he offered himself as being, then he should have loved these scholars and thinkers. With all their partialness and self-celebration, they were no more and no less than the product and expression of their time. Which is what Butterfield says he valued and wishes us to value.

But no—he dislikes the Whig-ness of the Whigs. Their yea-saying uppityness offends him.

What is the implicit alternative to this Whiggery?

It certainly isn't every man entitled to the validity of his own life and times.

No, the true alternative Butterfield would endorse has to be Toryism.

We have been told what a Whig history is. So what would a Tory history be? None of that latter-day, jumped-up, Whiggish boosterism, that's for sure. A proper Tory history would find its reference point and authority in the celebration of "eternal" values—which is to say, in traditional religion and the old hierarchical class structure.

Butterfield was of the party that wants things to be as they were and properly ought to remain. And that is what he was still trying to defend thirty-five years later in the Schama episode.

The closer you look at the phrase "Whig history," and the actual agendas of people employing the term, the more it becomes clear that it was, in its own time, as loaded and subjective and aggressively intended a buzz-word as "political correctness" is today. It might not be too far-fetched to suggest that Herbert Butterfield was the 1931 equivalent of Alan Bloom or Dinesh D'Souza. Indeed, it wouldn't surprise me at all to learn that Butterfield resembles these men in being

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an outsider-turned-insider defending prerogatives that he worked hard to attain.

In sum, "Whig history" isn't actual literary criticism or criticism of historical method at all, but mere academic and social wrestling for advantage. And when someone tosses the phrase around today, he's just regurgitating the cultural politics of yesteryear.

Not only aren't those politics relevant to the present moment, but they were nasty, vicious, ill-motivated politics in the first place. We ought to look very carefully at the premises, interests and motives of anyone who still promotes them, just as we would be well-advised to examine the intent and good faith of somebody who might side up to us today muttering of the international solidarity of the working classes, or the need of the Aryan race to maintain its purity, or pitching any other political slogan of sixty years ago.

If you don't agree, then I invite you to join me in backing Huey Long for President next year, in this hour when the country really needs a friend of the common man in Washington. A chicken in every pot! Indoor plumbing for all! Indict Neil Bush!

Where Butterfield is clearly right is in maintaining that the past should not be assessed as though it were just a predicate to an absolutely perfect (or the next thing to it) present moment. At best, however, he's only half-right.

For one thing, Whig history was a Nineteenth Century excess. And nobody, absolutely nobody, in the ambiguous, ultra-relativistic, self-questioning, multi-cultural late Twentieth Century Western world works with the kind of cocksureness, self-congratulation and finality that Butterfield is inveighing against. Not even Cory and I. (I take that back. There *was* that dude in the U.S. State Department with his recent essay declaring that history has come to an end and we won.)

Present history-writing grants Butterfield his point—to the extent that it is appropriate. Past ages and human states did have their own rationales and validities, and these deserve to be recognized and respected for their actual truth and worth. Even by hairy-cheested, universe-dominating, Twentieth Century scientific materialists who wish to take their weighing, measuring, extrapolating and relentless artifact-making as the final word in human thought and action. [Yep, I am talking to you, Brian Stablesford.]

What Butterfield fails to recognize is that there has to be a balance.

The past cannot be addressed purely and simply on its own terms. To do that, we would have to be people of that time and place. Not only would that limit us to knowing no more than those people did, but it is an outright impossibility. We are of our own moment and see with the eyes of this moment.

Past times, to be intelligible to us, must be interpreted. They must be related to us. They can only be meaningful and useful inasmuch as they are related—made relevant—to us.

We cannot escape our times and concerns and values. Nor should we, if indeed these have their own validity.

What we can do is not set up absolutes. We can balance our present perceptions against past—and future—points of view. Out of this variety of perspectives may emerge something like a holistic view which can appreciate the present—in context—without turning it into an idol.

The fact of the matter is that given present circumstances and states of mind, we cannot write history of the kind that the Whig historians wrote. If we tried, we would very soon blush or giggle. Nor can we write history with Herbert Butterfield's old-time faith in traditional values.

So how is history to be written at the end of the Twentieth Century?

The answer has to be new stories. New terms. New conclusions.

drawn.

Not phrased in terms of absolutes—either past or present. Nor in terms of arrival at final states. More likely in terms of ongoing processes.

Maybe from many different perspectives at once: the view of the moment that is under consideration, as tempered by awareness of what happened thereafter, as related to the problems and concerns of the present moment, as compared with the perspective of what still remains potential. With all of these voices having their turn to speak.

Perhaps not in the form of old-time, "objective," "this-is-the-way-it-was" history as all, which to the post-modern eye just looks like period storytelling dressed up in falsely authoritative language. Maybe in the form of fiction, like that of E. L. Doctorow or Simon Schama, which frankly presents ambiguous perspectives, and, not least, joyfully invokes the illuminating power of applied imagination. Maybe even as

fantasy or science fiction as in Gibson and Sterling's *The Difference Engine* or Rudy Rucker's *The Hollow Earth*.

Or maybe as one aspect among a number within the context of a cross-disciplinary study.

How should such strange, wayward, un-academic, un-objective, un-final "history" be judged? As with all human stories—by what it includes, and by what it makes possible.

In any case, anyone who is still stuck in the rigid categories and false certitudes of the Nineteenth Century—or 1931—needs to retort if they aim to deal with what is actually happening now in all its present character. The old toolkits simply don't apply.

That goes for sf writing and criticism, too. ▶

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Martian Rainbow by Robert L. Forward

New York: Del Rey/Ballantine Books, June 1991; \$18.00 hc; 334 pages

reviewed by Charles E. Gannon

Customarily, when we see a rainbow, we take it to be a good omen, a sign of marvelous fortune in our near future. A fan of hard sf can hardly glimpse the *Martian Rainbow* on the jacket of Dr. Robert Forward's latest book and not think it a portent, a promise of more of the daring concepts and scientific innovation that have highlighted the rest of his work.

Not surprisingly, this portent of wonder and fresh ideas is borne out in full. Dr. Forward examines the cutting edge of theoretical technologies with the unrestrained (and infectious) glee of a dedicated gadfly. The planetological realities of life on Mars receive equally original and enthusiastic treatments. Without exception, the scientific wonders of *Martian Rainbow* are impressive—and there are plenty of them.

In fact, maybe there are too many of them. The characters, and at times even the story, get lost in the rich, bubbling technosauce that dominates *Martian Rainbow*.

This isn't to say that there is a paucity of dramatic plotpoints within the story itself. Starting with a highly detailed (particularly from the technological standpoint) surprise attack on the Martian bases of the neo-Communists, *Martian Rainbow* draws most of its energy from the struggle between nice-guy scientist Gus Armstrong and his megalomaniacal twin brother, Alex. As a result of Alex's manipulations of terrestrial governments and populations, Gus and his fellow Martian colonists are faced with a steadily mounting flood of challenges. In the course of the book, the reader accompanies them on various exploratory missions into the Martian wilds, has a ringside seat for their discovery of an alien race, witnesses their creation of a habitable Death Valley (where atmospheric pressure is sufficient to provide humans with a shirtsleeves environment), and finally, rides shotgun on daring missions to the Moon and the Earth. The plucky underdog Martian colonists win each victory hardly thanks to technological ingenuity and innovative thinking—the products of which receive unstintingly detailed exposition.

The end result of this is a true SCIENCE fiction tale. But with the emphasis so strong on the science, the fiction aspect seems to have received short shrift. Even for a hard sf fan, good fiction means fresh prose, challenging themes, and believably complex characters. And unfortunately, it is in these areas that the techno-color brilliance of Dr. Forward's *Martian Rainbow* fades.

While *Martian Rainbow* is certainly a compelling tour through a technologically plausible world of space science and Martian colonization, the human side of that world refuses to come to life. Reminiscent of the "living diorama" techniques used by museums and historical recreation groups, *Martian Rainbow* frequently resorts to mail-order dialogue and "conference room briefings" as the primary means of introducing various plot developments and character motivations. The characters have been sacrificed in homage to the wonders of science. The human beings of *Martian Rainbow* are the only components of the environment that lack detail and development. Any surprises or epiphanies that the story might offer are to be found in the

science, not the fiction.

These shortcomings recall the aesthetic ancestry of modern sf, harkening back to the stylistic conventions of the Campbellian Golden Age. Consequently, *Martian Rainbow* is not just a journey into the future, but also a journey into the past: immersing oneself in the aesthetic of the narrative is akin to taking a trip on the Way-Back machine of Rocky and Bullwinkle fame. Unfortunately, Dr. Forward's excursion into our genre's past goes beyond a Campbellian fascination with science and the triumph of the rational man; he also revisits the most simplistic characterization and psychodrama formulas of Golden Age sf.

Although *Martian Rainbow* certainly runs against the contemporary current of sf—which suggests that "serious" sf obey and be judged by higher fictional standards—the validity of appraising such a work with the same demanding qualitative measures remains questionable. At the crux of this quandary is a critical dilemma: is serious science fiction the same as serious SCIENCE fiction?

This question—and its critical significance—is an extension of the problematic literary pedigree of all genre fiction. Is *Martian Rainbow* an example of a sub-sub genre, one further step into the endless gerrymandering of the sf genre into consecutively smaller (and more meaningless) pigeonholes? And if so, does this legitimize special critical considerations, or not?

Or is *Martian Rainbow* simply reflective of the stylistic and structural differences that exist within all fictional categories, including mainstream fiction? For instance, the style and characterization in Sidney Sheldon's *The Doomsday Conspiracy* can hardly be compared to that of Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose*, yet we can acknowledge both works as (essentially) mainstream novels. If we disregard Sheldon's essentially mainstream thrust by classifying *The Doomsday Conspiracy* as a member of the mystery/thriller genre, then where do we put Norman Mailer's recent *Hurricane's Ghost*? Does *Ghost*'s subject matter also make it "genre" fiction—or does the reputation of the author automatically "bump it up" into the rarified domain of "lit fic"?

At a certain point, genre and subgenre distinctions become hopelessly arbitrary and, therefore, useless. Just as we would not compare and contrast a Tom Clancy novel with the works of Saul Bellow, John Updike, or Thomas Pynchon, it makes little sense to assess Forward's work against that of Samuel R. Delany, Ursula K. Le Guin, or James Morrow. Neither Clancy nor Forward are striving to push back the boundaries of literature; they are simply trying to tell a story in which the characters tend to be less important than the technological and environmental realities that shape their worlds. Indeed, Clancy's trademark "techno-thrillers" are the mainstream cousins of a particular type of hard sf book that we might label as hypertechno-thrillers. Forward's *Martian Rainbow* certainly fits that label.

This is pure hypertechno spectacle, an extravaganza in which the playwrights to highlight the set design. As in his earlier works, Dr. Forward lets the reader know quickly and certainly that they are reading SCIENCE fiction. Dialogue, characterization, and theme are all clearly subservient to the science. The plot itself has been structured to support

the complete (and colorful) exposition of the story's key technologies. Keeping faith with the conventions of spectacle, Dr. Forward does not mislead his audience by invoking the forms or themes that are characteristic of "serious literature." He does not offer one clause, much less a whole sentence, that suggests any aspiration to achieving a reputation as a creator of belles lettres. His only apparent literary concern is that his prose remains functional enough to move readers through the scientific and technological novelties that he has arrayed for their pleasure.

Therefore, any attempt to appraise *Martian Rainbow* as though it were a work of "serious literature" would be purposeless as judging the merits of Disney World against those of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Both establishments offer journeys through visual, sensory, and conceptual wonders, but that is where their similarity ends.

One of the elements that gives Disney World its particular charm is the totality of the illusion; if we are willing to suspend our disbelief, we will be carried away into another world. There, everything gleams with untarnished, straight-from-the-neoprene newness, and no effort is spared in ensuring that this illusion remains seamless and complete. *Martian Rainbow* proves itself to be no Disney World—even when approached on its own "Scientific American-meets-The-Magic-Kingdom" terms. The ride through Dr. Forward's 21st-century Martian theme park follows tracks of decidedly bumpy prose, a flaw which compromises the illusion—and serves as a squeaky-wheeled reminder of this genre's checkered literary past.

Prose—regardless of genre—has come a long way since the good old bad days of the pulps, and the tastes of readers have changed along with it. Most readers are likely to be unforgiving of inadequacies, insistent upon realistic characters, believable dialogue, and non-formulaic plot development. *Martian Rainbow*'s plot devices are familiar; a good twin vs. evil twin dramatic axis, a (reincarnated) communist menace, the obligatory love affair across the growing cold of (the new) iron curtain, religious fanaticism versus individualist rationalism. Even the timing of certain plot points borrows from the old pulpish template; the story's most "outrageous" characters—such as rough-hewn female prospector Red Storm, scheming and licentious mayoral bombshell Diane Perkins, and conniving diplomasmatic journalist Maury Pickford—are introduced and developed at predictable intervals.

Also in keeping with its Golden Age predecessors, *Martian Rainbow* is politically complacent. Although American democracy turns into a cult of personality, and then evolves into a monstrous technocracy, the democratic principles save the day. Despite the America-as-villain angle (a thematic vein which was mined by the Golden Age greats such as Heinlein in *Revolt in 2100*), *Martian Rainbow* is essentially a wish-fulfillment fantasy that smacks of plaid pants and golf-green Republicanism. Small-town, democratic principles and entrepreneurial spirit, coupled with innovative science and technology, tame the wild frontier of Mars, defy the megalomaniacal theocracy of Earth, and eventually liberate the brainwashed masses of the Mother Planet. Topped off with the cherry of impending stellar exploration, *Martian Rainbow* is a grand old-fashioned confection that seems oddly out of place in our contemporary world of hurt. There is no sign or suggestion of the effects of overpopulation, famine, global warming, widespread desertification, or any of the other concerns that promise to have a major impact upon (at least) the next fifty years of human endeavor and experience. While these issues are admittedly not at the center of *Martian Rainbow*, their economic and social impacts are almost certain to shape future characters, agendas, and activities. In particular, their costs are likely to undercut "big science" and space exploration, the two centerpieces of *Martian Rainbow*.

One wonders, therefore, how in the midst of terrestrial retrenchment, all these fantastic machines and colonies were funded? One answer might lie in the "neo-Cold War" jingoism that propels the U.S. UN task force out to Mars in order to wrest the planet from Soviet control. But this once-handy rationalization for superpower investment in monstrously expensive space projects now seems a simplistic plot device. Although Forward never asserts that a renewal of Cold War one-upmanship is in fact the reason and rationale for the extensive development of Mars and cislunar space by 2035, it is the only factor that even suggests a possible motivation for such gargantuan industrial and high-tech efforts. Once again, the story bows to the science, since

Forward chooses not to zoom in on the social, political, or economic underpinnings of his "what if" world; he is telephoto-focused on the technology.

It is in this aspect that *Martian Rainbow* parts company with the best of the Golden Age offerings, particularly from the works of Heinlein (whom Forward cites as having inspired this novel). Forward's deep respect and admiration for Heinlein's work is evident not only in the novel, but in his Acknowledgments, where the author comments:

Some readers, midway through this book, might have a sense of déjà vu—that they have read something like this before. They have—in "Concerning Stories Never Written," a postscript to Heinlein's *Revolt in 2100*. I was concerned when my outline for this book showed strong resemblances to the plot concepts in that postscript, and wrote to Robert. But he called me up and encouraged me to go ahead.

While Dr. Forward's open acknowledgment of his conceptual debt to Heinlein is admirable (and necessary, since *Martian Rainbow* owes much of its theme and plot to *Revolt in 2100* and *The Moon is a Harsh Mistress*), it also invites the reader to make comparisons which are not to the author's advantage.

Heinlein's likable, quirky characters helped make those novels classics. Unfortunately, Forward has inverted Heinlein's narrative priorities; he spins his characters and story around a collection of scientific and technological speculations. Regardless of the value and originality of those speculations, the literary result is inevitable; a technologically realistic universe, but one that is populated by cardboard cut-outs.

One example of this inversion involves character reactions (or lack thereof) to the first discovery of an intelligent alien species. When Forward's humans have their first encounter with Martian intelligence, the most noteworthy aspect of their response is their clinical detachment. There is no evidence of cultural (or personal) introspection, changes in speciate-level ingroup/outgroup perceptions, or even the classic xenophobic hysteria: there is nothing.

There is the matter of realism at issue here. A reader has every reason to expect that the characters (almost all of whom are highly enthusiastic scientific types) should be deeply affected by the discovery of the aliens and thereby distracted from (or at least given added perspective on) human affairs. If on the other hand, this stunning discovery leaves the characters unmoved, then the reader has a reciprocal right to expect the author to focus on this typically low-key reaction. Why indeed would a group of scientists react to the first discovery of (and contact with) an alien intelligence in such a ho-hum fashion? Perhaps their current crisis is so great as to erode their interest in this one-of-a-kind human event?

Martian Rainbow also fails to explore adequately the personal and social impacts of theocratic absolutism and its perilous linkages with democratic governments, cults of personality, and the tactics of religious conversion. While one doesn't expect Forward to dive as deeply or as revealingly into this topic as did Heinlein (and, more recently, Margaret Atwood), his observations are disappointing in their brevity and superficiality.

Once again, the most interesting twist of this theocratic subplot turns out to be technological in nature. The followers of The Infinite Lord (who just happens to be the protagonist's evil twin brother; surprise, surprise) are compelled to wear Caps of Contact, through which they are simultaneously subjected to non-stop video brainwashing and are "watched" by the ruling elite of the Church of the Unifier. But Forward never goes any further in developing the psychological ramifications—and character consequences—of this evangelical Big-Brotherism.

The bottom line, then, is that individuals seem to have as little a place in the telling of *Martian Rainbow* as they do in the Church of the Unifier. The characters begin as—and remain—thumbnail sketches, unchanged by their surroundings or the events they live through.

I am a self-confessed fan of hard sf, accusations of literary recidivism notwithstanding. I admit to retaining a strong fondness for the style and works of the Campbellian era. But *Martian Rainbow*'s single-minded fixation upon science for its own sake is so extreme that it even pushes aside the most basic elements and criteria of narrative prose. Forward's

failure to develop characters that evoke a reader's sympathy—or empathy—hobbles everything else he attempts to achieve. The story suffers from a critical lack of energy, a deadly ennui that is symptomatic of its failing the most critical of all narrative health tests: 'so what?'

Faulting Forward for the stylistic and structural 'deficiencies' in *Martian Rainbow* is as much (or more) a matter of literary politics than criticism. Unless one is willing to insist that everything appearing on a printed page should either be artful or be kept from publication, critics and readers alike must remain mindful—and acceptant—of the fact that if a given type of narrative has a market, then it will see ink and receive shelf space. Such are the blessings of capitalism.

If as a genre is no more or less susceptible to this qualitative variability than any other family of narrative fiction. However, sf's critical watchdogs have a heightened degree of concern for the literary value of their genre's offerings. And one can hardly blame them, with the door out of sf's literary ghetto almost within reach.

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Speculative leaps, says Uppike, are precisely what sf is all about. The spectacle of the never-seen, the exotic, and the BIG. Uppike invokes Aristotle:

"The Spectacle has, indeed, an emotional attraction of its own, but of all the parts, it is the least artistic, and connected least with the art of poetry."

Point. Set. Match.

Think about it, my friends. What sets the greatest literature apart from the run of standard fiction—the stuff Ted Sturgeon referred to when he said, "Ninety percent of everything is crap?"

It is the poetry of the prose—poetry combined with keen intelligence and human insight to be sure, poetry used to

illuminate the eternal dilemma of the human heart in conflict with itself—but it is the poetry in the prose, nonetheless.

As Simmons goes on to point out, this poetry is exactly what sf has had too little of for far too long. He suggests that: "... we must continue to widen the gap between sf and sci-fi. Literary science fiction must no longer cohabit quite so freely with its sci-fi counterparts."

Regardless of whether or not we see such an end as desirable, or support Simmons's proposed means for achieving it, as authors are not required—nor are most of them strongly compelled—to labor in its cause. Literary duty to high standards and high purpose is only liberating to those authors who choose to seek it. Others—for various reasons—would consider it enslavement. Dr. Forward has chosen to focus on science, at the cost of—where need be—character and style. If this kind of narrative approach pleases him and his readers (and profits his publisher), then it would be tantamount to literary fascism for this critic to do more than shrug and keep faith with the proverb: *de gustibus non est disputandum*.

Here are the choices: From the standpoint of science speculation, *Martian Rainbow* is a bold, visionary step forward; die-hard technophiles may well find it to their boarding pass for a marvelous journey to Mars as it might be one day. From the standpoint of sf as a genre, it is a time warp back to the less-than-gleaming styles and standards of the Golden Age. Critical readers of sf will find *Martian Rainbow* a disappointing visit to reliquaries of yesteryear's prose. For those in the middle—those who are hard of fairs with high literary expectations—they will have to decide for themselves whether they find it acceptable to sacrifice style and character at the altar of science and novelty. The book may be a cornucopia of wondrous technological fruit, but *all* the fruit is technological in nature—there are no juicy drops of human blood, sweat, or tears to savor and remember.

There may be a pot of Campbellian technogold at the end of Forward's *Martian Rainbow*, but whether it's worth the trip or not—that is a matter of taste.

Charles E. Gannon lives in Suffern, New York.

King of Morning, Queen of Day by Ian McDonald

New York: Bantam, 1991; \$4.99 pb; 390 pages

reviewed by Brian Stableford

In a delicately ironic afterword to *King of Morning, Queen of Day*, Ian McDonald quotes David Langford's sarcastic observation that "in Fantasy ... all stories must run to three volumes and include a mention of the Wild Hunt." The reader, on reaching this afterword, will wryly recall that the story he or she has just finished was indeed distributed into three parts, albeit accumulated within a single weighty volume, and did indeed contain a mention of the Wild Hunt—but he or she will also be in no doubt that the casual insult has been utterly defused, because these things were done with the utmost propriety; there is absolutely nothing formulaic about *King of Morning, Queen of Day*.

A much shorter version of the first part of the novel appeared under the same title in McDonald's collection *Empire Dreams*. The story in question compares and contrasts the experiences of a romantically-inclined teenage girl and her father; while the former discovers the Land of Faerie in close proximity to their home and sets out to photograph the fairies, the latter deduces that an apparent comet is actually an alien spaceship and sets out to communicate with them by means of powerful flashing lights. The girl produces something very like the infamous faked photographs of the Cottingley fairies which fooled and beguiled Conan Doyle, but her father bankrupts himself trying unsuccessfully to prove his point in the face of public ridicule.

The short story revolves around its near climactic twist, which overturns the expectations of rationally-minded science fiction readers, whose reflexive sympathies automatically enlist them in the cause of the astronomer. The stereotyped fairies are, indeed, delusions of a sort—it is the power of the girl's imagination, reaching out by way of a capricious wild talent, which has brought them into actual being—but so are the aliens, who have been produced by exactly the same means

to a similarly seductive end. This de-science-fictionalizing move is, however, taken up very carefully as a premise for investigation in the longer version of the story and its two "sequels." This further exploration is conducted with the aid of a thoroughly scrupulous science-fictional conscience, but is no less bold for that, and the author provides an excellent exemplification of the way that a science-fictional method, when applied to the substance of fantasy, can make considerable adventurous headway into literary terra incognita.

The version of the original story contained in part one of the novel is much richer in detail, investigating much more closely into the conscious and subconscious motives of the central character. It provides a little more information about the vengeful "seduction" which she unwittingly inflicts upon her father in order to punish him for his lack of sympathy for her girlish fantasies, and a good deal more about the dangerous seduction which becomes the prime mover of the unfolding plot of the novel. McDonald carefully lays down the metaphysics which permits it to happen, inventing a realm of potential energy called the mygnam which responds to the myth-making activities of humans in general, but can be manipulated much more dramatically by the particular (hereditary and sex-linked) talents of rare individuals. He is equally careful in developing accounts of how the two subsequent inheritors of the talent learn to cope with and choose to deploy their gift—a process made very much more complicated and hazardous by the continued otherworldly existence of their ancestor.

The spirit of the short story is maintained in one vital and productive respect: the modern mythologies which produce such icons as first contact with alien beings are treated in *King of Morning, Queen of Day* exactly the same way as ancient Celtic mythology, and a central

theme of the novel as it progresses through the generations is the way in which our nascent myths and our perception of the mythologies of the past are altered and renewed. This not only permits some spectacularly melodramatic plot-twisting—especially in the final section when the up-to-the-minute-mythologies of teenage mutant ninja heroes, Space Invaders and slasher movies mingle and cross wires (literally) with Nimrod the Hunter & Co.—but allows an extraordinarily intimate interweaving of the fantastic materials of the plot with the texture of everyday life. McDonald seizes these opportunities with avidity and panache, and makes such pyrotechnic use of them that this book establishes him in the very highest rank of modern fantasy writers. Just as John Crowley's *Little, Big*—which also appeared as an original paperback, thanks to the reluctance of publishers to invest heavily in anything truly innovative—was the fantasy novel of the Eighties, *King of Morning, Queen of Day* will surely prove to be the fantasy novel of the Nineties. It is a masterpiece, certain to attain the status of an acknowledged classic in time, although it might have to get there via the cumulative support of a cult following if this paperback version proves to be as ephemeral as the majority of modern midlist paperbacks.

McDonald has already shown himself to be a stylish writer with a prolific imagination in the marvellously colorful *Desolation Road*, a work which did not suffer at all from being a sprawling patchwork of vignettes. His second novel, *Out on Blue Six*, was far less successful, mainly because the future society framework which was supposed to contain and constrain the elements of his plot was not up to the job. *King of Morning, Queen of Day* also has an abundance of fabulous vignettes—the first time we meet Tereias and Gocuzga in part two is beautifully bizarre, and it will be a very clever reader who figures out there and then

just who and what and why they are—but the ideative framework is sturdy enough to contain them all. Indeed, the true beauty of the exercise is that the ideative framework not only justifies but requires an elaborate array of stylized scenes and descriptions in which the minutely naturalistic jogs elbows with the flagrantly exotic. McDonald has such a love of words and their rhythms, coupled with such careful control of the logic of extrapolation, that he is able to work wonders in meeting this requirement; no other contemporary writer could have risen to the challenge with such elegance, wit and charm.

King of Morning, Queen of Day is a novel which brings the very best out of the three-part structure which so much modern heroic fantasy employs simply as a pastiche device. Here, each of the three parts adds a new layer of complexity and a new dimension of revelation to the unfolding vision. To cap all this with a climax which is satisfactory without being trite, and properly conclusive without there being any hint of *deus ex machina* about it, is a considerable feat—and one entirely worthy of the flawed superheroine who provides the culmination of the myth-sensitive line of descent.

It is difficult for a British writer—especially one who had remained curiously without honor even in his own divided country—to win awards whose voters and juries are predominantly American, but McDonald does have a following in the U.S.A. (*Desolation Road* topped the *Lancet* poll for best first novel two years ago) and there is every reason to hope that *King of Morning, Queen of Day* will be widely read, and that it will in consequence reap its just reward sooner rather than later. No devotee of intelligent fantasy can afford to miss it. ▶

Brian Stableford is the author of *The Empire of Fear*.

The Silicon Man by Charles Platt

New York: Bantam Spectra, 1991; \$4.50 pb; 253 pages

reviewed by Alexander M. Jeffers

Good as has arisen when authors have asked not only "What if?" but "What if... and people don't react at all the way you'd expect?" An example is Asimov's "Nightfall."

When the "What if?" is immortality, this approach is common, and the one-time contrarians seem commonplace, showing bored immortals, stuck in some permanent mental Southern California, longing for—you guessed it—mortality.

Or, as in Heinlein's *I Will Fear No Evil*, there is concern that the life-extending process is only available to a few, no matter how badly and widely it is wanted. The novelty of Charles Platt's *The Silicon Man* is its deft illustration of the horror an ordinary mortal might feel when confronted with immortality.

The reason Platt's protagonist is so put off is not neuroathetic fear of feces or fens but dismay at the conditions of immortality, and at his having been made immortal against his will. Set up, like many of novels, as a conventional thriller with a mystery-driven plot, *The Silicon Man* brings together a team of scientists and hackers willing to act like terrorists, and an Everyman detective who, Columbo-like, follows his hunches from a suspected illegal weapons deal to the researchers's secret.

That secret is a solution to the plight of minds trapped in mortal bodies: ditch the bodies. Unfortunately, this is just what they do, for the process of scanning the brain to transfer its contents to a machine is thoroughly destructive.

The researchers, some of whom face terminal illness, are more than glad to trade wetware for hardware, but, fearing mass hysteria and budget cuts, they have labored in secret for years.

When G-man James Bayley threatens their work, and possibly their chances of immortality, they deal with him by making him immortal; or by murdering him, depending on your point of view.

Platt has admirably avoided easy polarities and opted to push the reader's sympathies into complex shapes. He makes Bayley, who in many novels would be the representative of hatefully ignorant authority, a family man, with a young child and a wife who plays a significant part in the story. His shock at finding himself immortal is thus focused on his loss of his family.

It is not that communication is impossible between informorphs, as Platt dubs the immortalized, and those still burdened or blessed with flesh. Bayley's problem, and to a real extent the novel's, is that the mastermind of the program, Victor Gottbaum, is a B-movie mad scientist, crazy with lust for power, yet brutally cold and unfeeling. Is it only because he has to be?

Gottbaum has wired himself into complete control of the electronic world where Bayley ends up; he might allow Bayley a phone call "outside," but only a short one. And it soon emerges that for Gottbaum, shedding his aging body was but a baby step, a desirable and necessary means to a vastly more ambitious end.

While the importance of plot has not escaped Platt, who effectively mixes Bayley's digging, the plotter's race against time, and the gradual emergence of the significance of the project, the action still cools when it should be heating up. But the novel does not exactly become boring after Bayley's "death"; it is here that the hallowed sense of wonder is most often on display. Bayley's wife and child become more involved in the action, raising a rich array of ethical questions, and *Treasure of the Sierra Madre*-style disagreements arise between the plotter's.

However, Bayley, while immortalized in silicon, dies as a character as soon as his body does. Not that informorphs could not be interesting, active characters; but Bayley is not. For the rest of the novel, he observes and emotes and has things happen to him. The things that happen are interesting, and his gradual shift in perspective as he realizes that a threat to the project would now mean a threat to his own chances for extended pseudolife is nicely observed. But he doesn't do anything. Where he had before been a mix of mensch and schlemiel, he is now pure schlemiel. Where before his fate could arouse viral reader concern, there is eventually only curiosity.

Of course there are literary precedents for anti-heroes, but the midway shift in this novel is awkward. And while Bayley's fate is imaginatively described, it is not rich or strange enough to be called Kafkaesque.

This shift from a traditionally satisfying protagonist-driven narrative is reminiscent of the New Wave of the Sixties, when if writers experimented with, among other things, some of the Modernist literary

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devices seen in mainstream fiction years before Gernsback. Given this, it is interesting to revisit Platt's 1967 novel, *Garbage World*, which is dedicated to Platt's countryman Michael Moorcock, one of the crucial figures in the New Wave in Britain.

The asteroid of the title, sophomorically named Kopro, is the waste dump of a string of wealthy and obsessively clean worlds. The offworlders are formal, repressed, and ultimately genocidal: Sixties parent-figures. The inhabitants of Kopro are classic literary happy peasants. They collect junk and revel in dirt. They are Rousseau's noble savages, Lawrentian dream-figures, outer-space hippies.

They are not political communards—status is based on individual junk-hoards—but everyone drinks and slides around in the mud together and has a good time. Even so they are aware of the class conflicts represented by their position. Their life is rough; but they don't long for the cleanliness of the other worlds; they want to redistribute the filth; they are as righteous about it as the offworlders are about cleanliness.

The story follows a young ship's officer as he unsurprisingly falls for a woman from the wrong side of the spaceways, learns to forget about cleanliness, uncovers a nasty plot, and finally embraces the counterculture as gleefully as any student discovering Marcuse or tattoos.

For some reason, although everyone and everything on Kopro is messy, smelly, and dirty, there is no mention of disease, let alone problems of toxic waste. True, 1967 was just before The Environment became a major issue in nonspecialists' minds—before that there was just pollution—but there is enough radiation in the garbage to create mutant creepie-crawlers the size of spaceships, and we see nothing of adverse effects on humans.

Garbage World is hard to dislike, even if it is easy to dismiss. It revels in its image system with much gusto, and the characters act and interact with an amiable goofiness. The confrontations between the young officer and his martinet commander echo thousands of such fictional meetings between young love-sick heroes and unsympathetic bosses; here, we are not too many paces from Wodehouse.

Additionally, however much the themes of the novel play on the peculiar concerns of the late Sixties version of Romanticism, the story action itself is thoroughly Old Wave, and the book reads along far more satisfyingly than does *The Silicon Man*.

Both novels are about a big change. In *The Silicon Man*, characters deal with a change from fleshly mortality to metallic extended life. In *Garbage World*, the whole reeking worldlet is due for extremely radical landscaping. In each case, some characters see the change as a disaster, some as an opportunity.

It is to Platt's credit that in both novels, some characters change their views in the course of the action, and that neither camp has a monopoly on good. As in real life, many of the character's motives for action are less often based on a highly deliberate selection of which pett to play in a grand historical event, or a big sf novel, and more often

rooted in the problems and concerns of their personal lives.

But adult adversaries, like Larkin in *Garbage World* or Gottbaum in *The Silicon Man*, tend to be too one-sided. Gottbaum's ultimate effect on the world is decidedly ambiguous, but this leaves his figure more confusing than many-faceted. He ends up as something of a liberal *dieu ex machine* to the world, or perhaps a *dieu* in the machine, may Latinists indulge me.

The Silicon Man is a more thoughtful and mature work, full of good ideas and not a few stylistic grace notes, and in these ways a much better work than *Garbage World*. But if only the new book had more of the old in it. Not necessarily the brio, which might have been out of place, but the sheer dramatic tension to be gained from the continuing presence of an active protagonist.

Since the plot of *The Silicon Man* begins to slacken after Bayley "dies," there is a greater burden on its novel-of-ideas side. The burden is taken up well, and many interesting suggestions are made, questions raised, and implications explored.

But the subject matter is so intriguing that here too there is room for more—although a readable fictional waltz through all the possibilities would be a task to strain an immortal, or Stanislaw Lem.

Platt does well to take a contrarian approach to those having immortality foisted on them, and cannily makes plain, through the device of a systems crash, that the next leap in evolution might not be to perfect immortality but to a vulnerability to a different set of hazards. Check that surge protector twice, Methuselah.

There are other moments of surprise and ingenuity. One comes as the hacker Porter—neatly described as "coming on line" when giving someone his attention—is depicted as entering the computer as an infomorph and accessing a sort of "hacker heaven," where he can program at will and think in computer language.

Another is the scene in which Gottbaum denounces biochip technology as limited by natural contingencies, and a poor second to the unlimited possibilities opened up when imagination and machine get together. This is more fine contrarianism. Platt has taught computing and written on AI (*Artificial Intelligence in Action*), and his enthusiasm has paid off in sf terms by giving him more to offer than the by now too-standard consensual reality writers have taken up on the coasts of Gibson and others.

For further explorations of modes of immortality, artificial intelligence, biomedical and other ethics, and numerous other issues raised in the novel, sf readers can find related material handily within the genre. Robert Bloch's short story "The Hell-Bound Train" plays with the reluctance to give up change and hope for improvement even when static immortality is the prize. The same Ketzian-Yezian bipolarity is in play in James Tiptree Jr.'s "Slow Music."

Of course noting a few titles may lead to a hopelessly exfoliating task, as much of the history of myth, religion and philosophy is concerned with how to be immortal, or thank you will be, or deal with knowing you're not. There is no real resonance in *The Silicon Man* of all

this historical wondering and striving, and while again it may be unfair to criticize a book for not being a whole different thing than it set out to be, I still think, given the subject matter, there should have been more touches of poetry.

Most stories on immortality have focused on immortals in their original, if ever-renewed, bodies. The multi-competent, undying heroes of *Time Enough for Love* and *The Boat of a Million Years* deal with problems of love and loss as the short-lived die around them. In Kim Stanley Robinson's "Green Mars," biological longevity has been achieved, but humans can remember little more than a lifetime at a time anyway. The problems of canned immortals will be different. Platt's vision of life as an immortal is so interesting that one wants to know more, not only about the future of society if decanting succeeds, but about the potentialities of experience for preserved individuals.

For instance, does Bayley go insane enough? He does not become an unanchored, free-floating set of memories. His actions are highly restricted, but a management program provides him with a "body" and "places" to inhabit.

These immortals are far from godlike; they can only "experience" what has been programmed into the supercomputer where they have taken up final residence. Volitionless "pseudomorphs" minister to their sexual and emotional needs, up to a point. Beyond that, real outsiders or "real" infomorphs are needed for real companionship or argument.

The Best of 1991

Continued from page 24

Sarah Canavay by Karen Joy Fowler (Holt). A beautiful evocation of the Northwest circa 1873, with its tiny speculative element (the tide character) the wampeter about which everything revolves. "It claws itself from the swaddling clothes of s/he a butterfly," said John Clute in *Interzone*. Clearly the finest first novel of the year. [DGK/GVG]

The Spiral Dance by R. Garcia y Robertson (Morrow). Garcia y Robertson shows a wisdom in this first novel that has for the most part been lost in the fantasy field: he keeps his book to a modest length, without skipping on action, color, or characterization. This alone would not ensure success, but the authentic griminess of his 16th century Scotland and his very subtle use of the fantastic make this one of the most promising first fantasy novels of the year. [RKK]

Rats and Gargoyles by Mary Gentle (Viking/Roc). Here is the high weirdness of fantasy in the grand tradition. This novel shows the writer nurturing into full strength and setting striking new standards for imaginative excellence and powerful writing. Dark, surprising, inventive, unconventional, a treat for serious readers. [DGH]

The Difference Engine by William Gibson and Bruce Sterling (Bantam). Many expected this book to be bad, and many others wanted it to be something it is not (cyberpunk), but in fact Gibson and Sterling mix a well-researched Victorian setting and an action plot with ruminations on the possibilities of computer intelligence and the limits of scientific knowledge to produce quite a challenging and satisfying novel. [RKK]

Moonrise by Greer Ilene Gilman (Roc). The most stylistically-elaborate fantasy since Mervyn Peake, powerfully mythic and deeply rooted in forest and hearth. A completely unique experience. [DGK]

Win's That Pig Outdoors? by Henry Kisor (Penguin). Like *Sarah Canavay*, this can be read as an Alien Contact novel. That it is neither genre nor fiction seems irrelevant: it's an autobiography, subtitled "A Memoir of Deafness." [KLH]

King of the Dead by R. A. MacAvoy (Morrow). MacAvoy's *Lesser of the World* series promises to be one of the best fantasy works of the late '80s. It owes an obvious debt to Wolfe's *Book of the New Sun*, but MacAvoy's own touch makes it new. Don't wait for all the volumes to appear—each book tells a complete story, so you can get into this series now. [RKK]

That leaves the issue of whether true consciousness or intelligence can reside in a nonliving construct, which has been the focus of lengthy debate in sf and, more interestingly, across a range of academic disciplines. There is a slightly different spin here, in that the mind is not being built, only transferred and preserved, but problems remain for those who claim that inorganic sentience is impossible.

Platt skips around some of the technical problems by setting the action fifty years in the future, but says in an Author's Note that he thinks the needed technology may become available sometime in the next century; a development he welcomes as a "liberation." This makes it more interesting, and laudable, that Platt chose to focus on a sympathetic opponent-victim of the process.

But in the end Gottbaum is the one who makes things happen, and while any honest fiction will mix good and bad characters on different sides of the issues, having Gottbaum and Bayley at such extremes creates a lot of shear.

The Silken Man is a thought-provoking, thoughtful novel that works better as a novel of ideas than as a novel per se. This is disappointing, because Platt took some early trouble to provide a series of conventional narrative hooks, but in the memory the ideas last beyond the story or characters. ▶

Alexander M. Jeffers lives in New York City.

King of Morning, Queen of Day by Ian McDonald (Bantam Spectra). Easily the most interesting in-genre novel of the year, this beautifully written sfal fantasy follows three generations of Irish women through the transformations and developments of Myths in each of their eras. [KLH]

The Sorceress and the Cygnets by Patricia A. McKillip (Ace). An unconventional quest, beautifully written by one of the masters of fantasy. It is lyrical and humorous with wonderfully eccentric characters and rich, evocative imagery. [SD]

Russian Spring by Norman Spinrad (Bantam). Though world events have made this novel literally out-of-date, Spinrad's merciless indictment of our nation's failure to pursue a space program, and his passionate evocation of what is still good about America amid all the bad, make this prophetic novel Spinrad's best in a long time. If you dreamed of flying on the Moon when you were a kid, this book will first break your heart and then put it back together, much better for the experience. [RKK]

Strations of the Tide (Morrow) and *Gravity's Angels* (Arkham House) by Michael Swanwick. Each of his novels has been a major leap above its predecessor; *Strations* (mysterious, colorful, complex, compressed) grows in the memory. *Angels* collects his underappreciated short fiction (particularly the amazing "Ginungagap"). [DGK/GVG/RKK]

Beauty by Sheri S. Tepper (Doubleday). A disturbingly dark fairy tale. Humor and intelligence leaven this stylistically rich fantasy of ecological, political, and religious disaster. [SD]

Skin of the Soul: New Horror Stories by Women edited by Lisa Tuttle (Pocket). An overtly rhetorical anthology in the tradition of Judith Merril's Best-of-the-Year volumes, *Skin of the Soul* responds to the male chauvinism of the contemporary horror field with the claim that "fear is a basic and universal emotion." Among my favorites in the book are "The Ancestress" by Josephine Saxton, "Ticanau's Child" by Sherry Goldsmith, "Amaz Day" by Cherry Wilder, and Tuttle's own story, "Mr. Elphinstone's Hands." [KC]

Night of the Costers and More Near Stories by Howard Waldrop (Unus/Legend). Waldrop's most recent collection combines pastiches and alternate histories. Told in his own always-eclectic style, with research to match. The new-to-this-collection "Fin de Cycle" is a particular highlight. The Legend edition includes the novella "A Dozen Tough Jobs." [KLH/DGK] ▶

Work in Progress

A Bibliographic Checklist of First Editions, by L. W. Currey

Draft: Compiled 2/91

*indicates entry not seen.

DAN SIMMONS

b.

BANISHED DREAMS. *Arvada, Colorado: Roadkill Press, [1990].*

Wrappers. *This first edition of BANISHED DREAMS was limited to three hundred copies/all signed and numbered by the author on page [28].* Note: Excerpts from an early draft of SUMMER OF NIGHT consisting of dream sequences cut from the published version of the novel.

CARRION COMFORT. *Arlington Hts., Illinois: Dark Harvest, 1989.*

Three issues, no priority: (A) 26 lettered copies signed by Simmons and Kathleen McNeil Sherman. Not issued in dust jacket. In wooden slipcase [not seen]. (B) Black cloth (imitation leather), spine panel stamped in silver. 450 numbered copies signed by Simmons and Sherman. In cloth slipcase. (C) Blue cloth (imitation leather), spine panel stamped in silver. Trade issue. First edition so stated on copyright page.

ENTROPY'S BED AT MIDNIGHT. *Northridge, California: Lord John Press, 1990.*

450 copies printed. Three issues, no priority: (A) Blue marbled boards with black cloth spine panel, spine panel lettered in gold. 100 numbered copies signed by Simmons. In black cloth slipcase. Note: Not issued in dust jacket. (B) Brown cloth with black cloth spine panel, spine panel lettered in gold, front panel lettered in black. 300 numbered copies signed by Simmons. Note: Not issued in dust jacket or slipcase. (C) Binding as per Binding B. Last line on colophon page (page [37]) reads *Presentation copy*. Note: According to the publisher, 50 copies of this issue were prepared. *This first edition . . . on page [37].*

THE FALL OF HYPERION. *New York London Toronto Sydney Auckland: A Foundation Book Doubleday, [1990].*

Two issues, no priority: (A) Red boards with brown cloth shelf back, spine panel stamped in gold. (B) Wrappers. *A Foundation Book 0-385-26747-9* (\$8.95). *March 1990/First Edition* on copyright page. Note: Both issues drop page 305 and page [306] is duplicated. An errata leaf reproducing page 305 was prepared subsequent to distribution of this book and thus may not be found in all copies.

HYPERION. *New York London Toronto Sydney Auckland: A Foundation Book Doubleday, [1989].*

Two issues, no priority: (A) Pink boards with blue cloth shelf back, spine panel stamped in gold. (B) Wrappers. *A Foundation Book 0-385-26348-1* (\$8.95). *June 1989/First Edition* on copyright page.

HYPERION CANTOS. *[Garden City]: Guild America Books, [1990].*

Boards. No statement of printing on copyright page. First printing does not have printing code. Reprint. Collects HYPERION and THE FALL OF HYPERION. Note: Issued by the Science Fiction Book Club.

*** PHASES OF GRAVITY.** *Toronto New York London Sydney Auckland: Bantam Books, [May 1989].*

Wrappers. *Bantam Spectra 0-553-27764-2* (\$4.50).

ALSO: *[London]: Headline, [1990].* Four issues, no priority: (A) Black leather, spine panel stamped in gold, front cover stamped in blind. 26 lettered copies signed by Simmons [not seen]. (B) Binding as per Binding A. 250 numbered copies signed by Simmons. Limitation statement reads: *This First Edition of PHASES OF GRAVITY is limited to two hundred and fifty copies/signed and numbered by the author/[signature]/of which this is number [number inserted].* In paper slipcase. Note: Issues A and B not issued in dust jacket. (C) Black boards, spine panel stamped in gold. Trade edition. Note: Issues A, B and C constitute the first hardcover edition. (D) Wrappers. *Headline 0-7472-7979-9* (£7.99) [not seen]. *First published in Great Britain in 1990/. . . / 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1* on copyright page.

PRAYERS TO BROKEN STONES. *Arlington Hts., Illinois: Dark Harvest, 1990.*

Three issues, no priority: (A) Brown boards (imitation leather), spine and front panels stamped in gold. 52 lettered copies signed by Simmons and artists Ron Lindahn and Val Lakey Lindahn. In wooden slipcase. (B) Yellow-green boards spine panel stamped in black. 550 numbered copies signed by Simmons and artists Ron Lindahn and Val Lakey Lindahn. In cloth slipcase. (C) Gray boards, spine panel stamped in dark blue. Trade issue. First edition so stated on copyright page.

SONG OF KALI. *[NEW YORK]: Bluejay Books Inc., [1985].*

First Bluejay printing: November 1985 on copyright page.

SUMMER OF NIGHT. *New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, [1991].*

Boards with cloth shelf back. First printing has code 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 on copyright page

Note: This is part of a series of bibliographic checklists of sf and fantasy writers that will update, revise, and expand the standard reference work *Science Fiction and Fantasy Authors* by L. W. Currey. For the organizational principles and methodology used in this and future lists, please refer to the introduction to that work. Knowledgeable persons are invited to communicate addenda and corrigenda directly to L. W. Currey, Elizabethtown, NY 12932.

The Best of 1991

Recently read and recommended by
the NTRSF staff:

'Tis the season once again—as the shortest, darkest day of the year approaches, we take time to count the literary blessings of the fading twelvemonth past. The following list of books (novels, anthologies, story collections; short fiction will come next month) does not pretend to comprehensiveness, but we believe every book mentioned will generously reward a reading, and they are surely some of the most notable books of 1991.

Full Spectrum 3 edited by Lou Aronica, Amy Stout, and Betsy Mitchell (Doubleday). The best of this series to date, and the most interesting original sf anthology since *In the Field of Fire*. Would be noteworthy if only for the first mass-market publications of Michael Bishop's "Apartheid, Superstrings, and Mordecai Thubana" and Gregory Benford's "Matter's End"—and those aren't even the best stories in the book. [KLH]

Heads by Greg Bear (St Martin's). First U.S. publication of a novella published in the U.K. and *Interzone* last year; improves with every rereading. This Heinleinian tour de force combines good hard science with Bear's solid understanding of the mechanics of business and politics (and a sharp poke at religious cults). [KLH/RKK]

War Fever by J. G. Ballard (Farrar, Straus, Giroux). From the excellent title story, undoubtedly sf, to such bizarre delights as "The Index" and "Answers to a Questionnaire" (both arguably not even fiction, though fictive), this collection displays the seemingly casual grace with which Ballard continues to pluck our intellectual strings. [RKK]

Tender Loving Rage by Alfred Bester (Tafford). Uneven (and not science fiction, if that concerns you) but delightful, full of vintage Bester touches and fascinating both in itself and as a vision of life in the late '50s. (The computer that shows up was a cutting-edge product at the time.) Brims with wonders and marvels. [GVG]

Bone Dance by Emma Bull (Ace). Denser, more complex, and more satisfying than her two promising earlier novels. Tarot and voodoo meet high-tech in a decaying future. [DGK]

Buddy Holly is Alive and Well on Ganymede by Bradley Denton (Morrow). It's too long, but you probably won't notice as Denton juggles characters and a uniquely rock-and-roll version of history through a contemporary novel with sf elements. Neatest thing about it: not one mention of "American Pie." [KLH/RKK]

The M.D.: A Horror Story by Thomas M. Disch (Knopf). Savage sociopolitical commentary blended beautifully with strange storytelling. A deep and thoughtful novel, fascinating in its own right, provocative in its interplay between sf and horror. [GVG/KGH]

(continued on page 22)

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